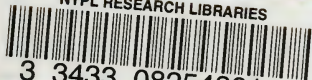


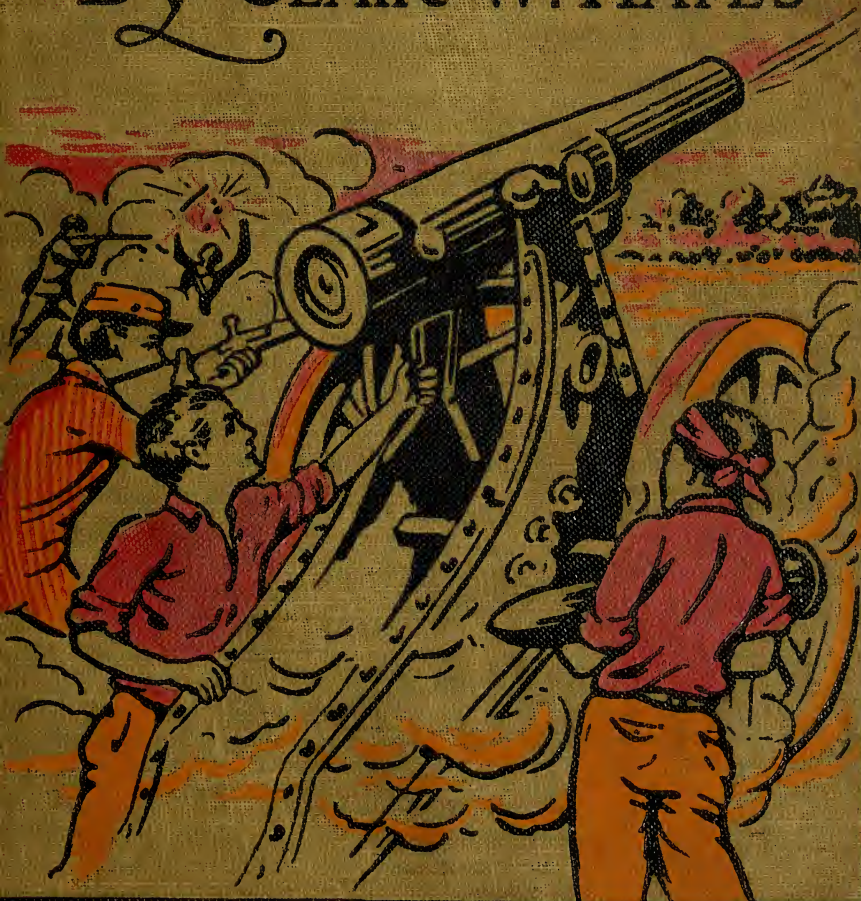
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THE BOY ALLIES WITH THE GREAT ADVANCE

By CLAIR W. HAYES



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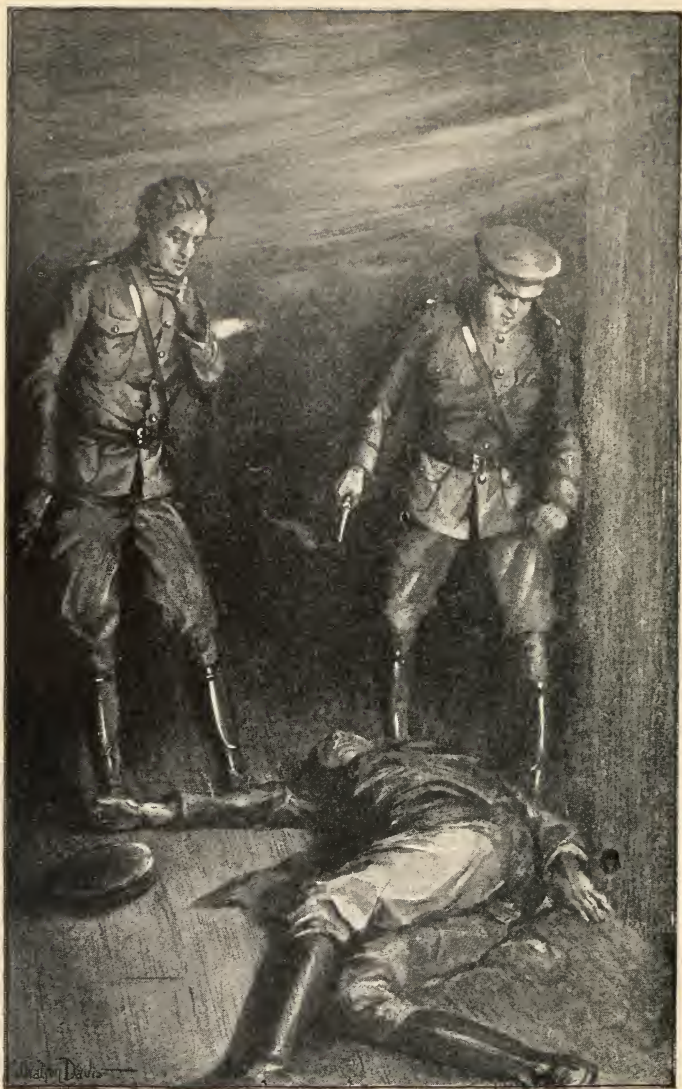
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"You dropped him just in time," said Chester. "Great Scott! what a grip he had," he added.

Page 83

The Boy Allies With the Great Advance.

The Boy Allies

With the Great Advance

OR

Driving the Enemy Through France
and Belgium

By CLAIR W. HAYES

AUTHOR OF

"The Boy Allies With the Army Series"



A.L. BURT COMPANY
NEW YORK

1919

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THE BOY ALLIES WITH THE GREAT ADVANCE

THE BOY ALLIES WITH THE GREAT ADVANCE

CHAPTER I

STUBBS HAS AN IDEA

"YES," said Top Sergeant Bowers to the little group that surrounded him, "this war game is a great trade and it's an easy trade to pick up at that, if you go about it in the right way."

"Is that so?" demanded Anthony Stubbs, war correspondent of the *New York Gazette*, who, through devious ways known only to members of the newspaper craft, had wormed his way into the uniformed circle gathered in an unexposed position close to the American front just to the east of Chateau Thierry.

It was two days after American marines and American soldiers had turned the tide of war by their heroic actions in Belleau Woods and, unaided, had stemmed the tide of the German advance and

opened the way for the grand Allied offensive that was to follow.

"You may be right," Stubbs continued, "but to my mind the war trade, as you call it, sergeant, is one that I never could pick up."

Sergeant Bowers sniffed contemptuously.

"No one would expect you to pick it up," he said somewhat disdainfully. "All you will ever be able to do is pick up news, as you call it, which amounts to nothing, after all."

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" laughed a voice a short distance away.

Stubbs wheeled angrily.

"That remark may be funny to you, Hal Paine," he exclaimed, "but it's bad taste, if you ask me."

"Come, Mr. Stubbs," said Captain Hal Paine, "don't be angry. I didn't mean anything, I assure you."

"Maybe not," growled Stubbs, "but I'm not convinced of it."

"You're never convinced of anything, are you, Mr. Stubbs?" asked another voice, that so far had not entered the discussion.

"You'll oblige me by keeping quiet, Chester Crawford," said Stubbs angrily.

"Oh, all right," said Captain Chester Crawford, and turned to his companion with a whispered remark. "Little man's peeved again, Hal," he said.

Stubbs' astute ears caught the remark.

"Look here, you boys," he said, "Sergeant Bowers is trying to explain a few things to me, and I'll thank you if you'll keep quiet."

"Very well, Mr. Stubbs," said Hal. "We will consider ourselves most properly called down. Continue, sergeant."

"Well," went on Top Sergeant Bowers, "as I was saying, this war game is easy enough. All you've got to do is remember a few things. But you've got to keep on remembering those few things all the time. If you forget one of 'em, it's liable to be the last opportunity you have to forget anything."

"What sort of things, sergeant?" asked Stubbs. "It seems to me you fellows have got things down pretty pat."

"Oho!" replied the sergeant. "It does, eh? Well, let me tell you, some of these men here don't know half as much as they think they do."

"You talk like a veteran campaigner, sergeant," declared Stubbs.

Sergeant Bowers glowered at Stubbs suspiciously.

"Look here," he exclaimed, "are you trying to have some fun with me? I've only been over here a few months and you know it. Don't you try to play with me like that."

"No, no, sergeant," Stubbs hastened to say. "I meant no harm, I assure you."

"Well, maybe not," growled the sergeant, but he was plainly unconvinced.

"Please explain further, sergeant," interposed Hal. "Mr. Stubbs here is always a good listener."

"Well, I don't know why I should," declared Sergeant Bowers. "He's not a fighting man and the information won't do him any good. However, I'll proceed. Now, there aren't so many things to remember after all. Learn to duck when a Minnie grunts or a whiz-bang cuts loose; or a five-nine begins to whine. Learn not to bother to duck when the rifles get to talking—for you'll never hear the bullet that gets you. Study the habits of the machine guns and the way the snipers act. And here's the thing that you want to say to yourself: 'The bullet ain't ever been molded than can get me.' Mean it when you say it. When you've learned those few things the rest of the war game is dead easy."

"You've forgotten one thing, sergeant," said Hal at this juncture.

"Have I?" said the sergeant, somewhat nettled. "What is it, sir?"

"Why," said Hal, "you've forgotten one of the most important features of all. How must a man act when he finds himself in that place where eyes are of no use?"

"Right, sir," said Sergeant Bowers. "I forgot to mention that, but it wouldn't do any good. There is nothing I can say that will be of benefit to a man when he finds himself there, sir."

"When eyes are of no use?" repeated Stubbs. "What do you mean, Hal? If you mean after dark—why we've the big searchlights and the star shells, haven't we?"

"Mr. Stubbs," said Sergeant Bowers dryly, "we have, although I'm free to confess I don't understand how that fact ever penetrated your brain. But since you know so much, perhaps you'll tell me what use all the lights in the world are going to be when the filthy yellow gray fog begins to ooze up out of the mud and the shell holes, and the filthy gray mist oozes down from the clouds to meet it. Fog is the one thing that all the war science won't overcome. Nobody has invented a fog-penetrator yet. Fog gives the enemy a great chance to creep up on us——"

"But," protested Stubbs, "it should be of advantage to us as well."

"It should be, maybe," the sergeant admitted, "but it ain't. No, sir, you can take it from me that Fritz gets all the benefit from the fog."

"But, sergeant," put in a soldier some distance off, "fog has helped us once or twice. Now I mind at Combles——"

"Well, maybe the fog did help us there," admitted Sergeant Bowers with some sarcasm, "but it only helped us about one per cent's worth. Wallace, if you ask me, was there with the other ninety-nine."

"Who's Wallace?" asked Stubbs. "An American or a Scotch general?"

"No," said Sergeant Bowers, "a Scotch collie."

"I don't catch your meaning, sergeant," Stubbs protested.

"You will soon, Stubbs," said Chester. "I heard Colonel Harlow say this morning that Wallace was expected to-day with dispatches."

"Oh, a dispatch dog," said Stubbs understandingly. "Why didn't you say so, sergeant?"

"Because I didn't have to say so," exclaimed Sergeant Bowers angrily. "I give most men credit for having some common sense."

Stubbs forebore to reply, while Hal, Chester and the other men smiled. Sergeant Bowers swung about on his heel and moved away. He stopped after a few paces, however, and walked up to Hal.

"I understand, sir," he said, "that there is to be a reconnoitering party sent out to-night?"

Hal nodded.

"So I understand, sergeant," he said.

"I wish you could arrange for me to go with the others, sir," said the sergeant. "It seems like an age since I've done any work."

"I'll see what can be done, sergeant," Hal promised. "I'd be glad to go myself."

"And I, sergeant," declared Chester.

The sergeant saluted and took his departure. Stubbs approached Hal and Chester.

"Say," he remarked.

"Say what?" demanded Hal.

"Now don't get funny, Hal," Stubbs urged. "But I've just had a great idea."

"That's the only kind you have, Stubbs," interposed Chester, "but let's hear it."

"Well," said Stubbs, "don't you think the people at home would like to get real first-hand details of such a reconnaissance as you mentioned just now?"

"I suppose they would," Hal agreed. "It would make what you call a good story."

"My idea, then," said Stubbs, "is to go along on this expedition."

"Come, now, Mr. Stubbs," said Chester. "You know that is out of the question. Colonel Harlow, of course, would not permit it."

"I don't see why," said Stubbs.

"Against military regulations," said Hal.

"Military regulations be hanged!" exclaimed Stubbs. "If I want to go out into No Man's Land there I guess I've got a right to do it."

"Guess again, then, Mr. Stubbs," smiled Chester. "The colonel wouldn't stand for it."

"Well, I guess I can go without his authority."

"I wouldn't try it, if I were you, Mr. Stubbs. In the first place, if you went you'd probably be killed; but if you did manage to get out alive you'd be put under arrest for a breach of army regulations."

"They couldn't keep me locked up forever," Stubbs mumbled, as he turned and walked away.

"By Jove, Hal!" said Chester. "You know when he gets an idea like that he's just crazy enough to try and go through with it."

"I know it," replied Hal, "and I believe that is what he is figuring on doing."

"If he does he'll be sorry, of course. I remember the last time you and I had to bring him back from No Man's Land. I don't want to have it to do over again."

"Nor I. However, he knows it's risky going out there and he may give up the idea. He's not much of a fighter, you know."

"That's true enough, but at the same time he has shown courage enough on one or two occasions and has helped us out of some bad holes. He'll fight when he has to."

"Certainly he has a habit of getting into tight places," Hal agreed. "He doesn't seem to be afraid to go any place on the trail of a piece of what he calls news."

"We'll have to keep an eye on him, at all events," Chester declared.

"Right," said Hal. "In a way I feel rather responsible for him."

"Here too. Well, let's jog back to our quarters. Things are too quiet around here to suit me."

"I'm with you," Hal agreed.

They had scarcely made themselves comfortable with a magazine each when a lieutenant entered and saluted them.

"Compliments of Colonel Harlow, sirs," he said, "and he would have you report to him immediately."

The lads followed the lieutenant from the little dugout they called home.

"Something up, Hal," declared Chester eagerly.

"Right," Hal agreed. "I hope it's something worth while."

CHAPTER II

THE BOYS MEET WALLACE

THE great war, a few days before this story opens, had taken a turn in favor of the Allies and it was due to the heroism of American troops alone that this change in the tide had been brought about.

When the Germans launched what was destined to be their last great effort to break through to Paris and thus end the war, it was the Americans who proved the stumbling block in an otherwise smooth road. Two divisions of American marines—16,000 men—and one brigade of regular army men not only stemmed the tide of the German advance, but pushed back the flower of the Kaiser's hordes and showed to the other Allies what real fighting was.

From this blow the Germans were never to recover. The German drive was launched with the fierceness that had characterized all German offensives from the beginning of the war in 1914. True, their ranks did not present the same formidable front they had in the early days of the war, but neither did the Allies, for that matter.

Back went the French under the heavy blows. All along the line they retired. Paris became alarmed. For the moment it appeared that the French troops would be unable to resist the shock. And probably the foe would have been successful had it not been for the timely assistance rendered by the handfull of Americans brigaded at that moment in Belleau Woods.

The stand of the American marines at Chateau Thierry is history now; but it is history that will live long in the memories of every American; and it will live as long in the hearts of the free people of Europe, for it saved to them the right of freedom and true democracy. The stand of the American marines—and their advance later—was to prove something that had been long needed. It was to prove that the formidable German lines were not impenetrable. The battle of Chateau Thierry strengthened the morale of all the Allied armies and instilled a fresh and unconquerable spirit into the men.

So the thousands of American lives that were

laid down on the altar of freedom at Chateau Thierry were not sacrificed in vain.

Previous to the battle of Chateau Thierry the war situation had been anything but favorable to Allied arms. True, the Germans had been checked with terrible slaughter in the Ypres sector when von Hindenburg in the spring of 1917 launched a gigantic offensive for the channel ports. But the Allies had lost many miles of territory in this fighting.

For some reason that was not plain to military experts in the United States, Marshal Foch, the commander-in-chief of all the Allied armies operating in Europe, had not deemed the time ripe for an Allied offensive after the Germans had been checked, and was content to rest on his laurels. So, for the moment, the struggle again was deadlocked.

The Italians and Austrians, on the battlefields of the Alps, were still fighting furiously, with advantage first to one side and then to the other. It appeared that there would be no decision there soon.

American troops were being poured into France at the rate of 125,000 a month. It was clear, of course, that the outcome of the war was no longer in doubt if these American reinforcements continued to arrive. The numerical superiority of the Allies, thus increased, soon must be too great for the Germans to withstand.

In the midst of all this fighting Hal Paine and Chester Crawford, his chum, had played their rôles as best they could. And so successful had been their

efforts that now, at the ages of less than twenty, both had won the rank of captain.

The two boys had been constant companions since early childhood. Thanks to their early training, when their time came to take their places in the greatest war game of history each was fitted for his part. Both spoke French and German as fluently as they did their own tongue and each had a smattering of Italian.

From their early youth they had been proficient in the art of self-defense and in the early days of the war—before the United States went to the aid of the hard-pressed Allies—the lads had learned to handle sword and firearms with the best.

Hal and Chester had seen active service in all the important theaters of war. Their first service was rendered in the cause of unhappy Belgium when the German hordes invaded that little country. They had been in Berlin when Germany declared war on France and in getting out of the country became separated from Hal's mother. Arrived at Liege, they decided to cast their lot with the Belgians and they took part in the defense of the city against the enemy.

Later they were attached to the French and British armies and also for some months they saw service with the Russian Cossacks at a time when the Russian army was a formidable opponent.

Each had fought with the Italian army in the Alps and with the Serbians and Montenegrins in

the Balkans. So far, they had never failed in a mission with which they had been entrusted. Marshal Joffre, when he commanded all the French armies in the field, had several times availed himself of the lads' service, as had Sir Douglas Haig, the British commander-in-chief. They had also accomplished several important missions for General Pershing, the American commander.

The long battle line on the Western front now extended from just east of Ypres in the north, south into the Soissons region, where it worked sharply eastward for perhaps fifty miles, then curved southward again through the Argonne Forest into Alsace-Lorraine. In these lost French provinces American and French troops were now on German soil, approaching the great fortress of Metz.

Not since the early days of the war had Allied troops set foot on German soil until this advance on the extreme southern end of the battle line had carried them into enemy territory. The world knew now that they would never relinquish this advantage.

News now began to filter through the German lines of internal disturbances in the Fatherland. It appeared that the relations between Germany and her allies—Austria, Bulgaria and Turkey—were considerably strained, that it was likely one or the other of these allies might sue for a separate peace at almost any time.

It had appeared for some time that the Allies

would do well to launch a grand offensive, but until the American advance in Belleau Woods and at Chateau Thierry it seemed that no such order would be given. But now that American troops had proven the German line not impenetrable, that the German morale was not the same it had been in the early days of the war, every man in the Allied armies expected almost momentarily the order to advance.

And the order was to come soon; and following it was to come the fighting such as, with the exception of Chateau Thierry, the world had never known. The question was, "Where will the storm break?" Marshal Foch decided this question. The storm broke in the Argonne and it was American troops that again showed the way.

Hal and Chester, summoned to the headquarters of Colonel Harlow, made their way there at once. They were admitted to the presence of the colonel immediately.

"Captain Crawford," said the colonel after the usual salutes had been exchanged, "I have summoned you here for rather a delicate mission."

"Yes, sir," said Chester.

"And you, Captain Paine," added the colonel, "I have summoned for the same purpose."

"Yes, sir," said Hal.

The colonel was silent a few moments before speaking. Then he said:

"First I want you to know, however, that I have

here a communication from General Bundy in which you are both cited for gallantry under fire."

Hal and Chester blushed and saluted and stammered:

"Yes, s-sir!"

"Also," continued Colonel Harlow, "to-morrow I have orders for you to report directly to General Seibert, who will be in personal command of operations to be undertaken in the Argonne."

The heart of each lad leaped in his breast.

"You mean that we are to advance at last, sir?" exclaimed Chester eagerly.

Colonel Harlow smiled.

"I can tell you nothing officially," he said, "but I will not disappoint you with a denial."

Hal and Chester both knew that the colonel meant a grand advance had been decided upon.

"In the meantime," Colonel Harlow went on, "I have a piece of work that must be accomplished to-night and I have called you lads here to learn whether you care to have a hand in it."

"Of course we do, sir," declared Hal.

Again Colonel Harlow smiled.

"As impetuous as ever, eh?" he said. "Well, so be it. Now pay strict attention."

The lads obeyed.

"I have information," said Colonel Harlow, "that leads me to believe the enemy out there"—and he waved his hand in the direction of No Man's Land—"are up to some mischief. Whether they are

planning an attack, or a feint to distract attention from other fronts, I don't know. I've no idea what they're up to, but they're up to something; I'm sure of that. Now what I want you to do is to lead a party through No Man's Land to-night, get as close to the enemy as possible and see if you can learn anything. That's all."

"Very well, sir," replied Hal.

"I won't hamper you with instructions," the colonel continued. "You may conduct the reconnaissance in your own way."

Hal and Chester saluted, turned sharply on their heels and approached the door. As they would have passed out, a long shaggy shape bounded suddenly into the room, and paying no attention to them, walked up to Colonel Harlow, where it stood perfectly still.

Chester voiced an exclamation.

"Wallace!" he said.

Colonel Harlow turned to the lad.

"I didn't know you and Wallace were acquainted," he said.

"We're not, sir," said Chester.

"Then you shall be," declared the colonel. "Wallace shake hands with the captain."

Gravely the big collie extended a paw, which Chester grasped. He shook hands with Hal next. Colonel Harlow reached down and removed a paper which was tied to the dog's collar.

"There, now," he said, patting the dog's head. "You are free for the day. Report to me in the morning, sir."

The dog wagged his tail and followed Hal and Chester from the colonel's presence.

CHAPTER III

THE RECONNAISSANCE

At four o'clock that afternoon the sky was perfectly blue; at five o'clock a haze blurred the battlefield and the broad expanse of No Man's Land beyond. At six o'clock a blanket-fog rolled in and the air was moist and almost unbreathable. The fog lay so thick over the earth that objects ten feet away were invisible.

Less than a quarter of a mile away, across No Man's Land and a double barrier of wire entanglements, lay the German trenches. It was possible that occupants of those positions consisted only of a regiment or two; on the other hand, it was possible also that the Germans were massed there in even greater force.

It was to determine these facts and to learn also of recent activities in the enemy lines that Hal and Chester had been ordered to penetrate the blanket of fog that night and ascertain just how the situation stood.

At eleven o'clock that night, while the thick fog

still held, Hal and Chester, followed by ten men, climbed over the top, single file and moved into the darkness. A few feet behind them, although they did not know it, crept another figure.

This was Anthony Stubbs, war correspondent.

The little man, fully alive to the fact that something was up that night, and mindful of his words earlier in the day, had kept close watch. He knew that his presence would hardly be detected in the dense fog, but he realized at the same time that it behooved him to keep as close to the others as possible or he might lose his bearings and possibly fall into the hands of the enemy.

It was a night wherein a hundred searchlights and a million star-flares would have no more impression on the density of the fog than would the striking of a safety match. Yet the men were ordered by Hal to proceed in the cautious manner customary on all such expeditions.

They moved forward at Hal's order, tiptoeing abreast, some twenty feet apart from one another, and advancing in three-foot strides. Every thirty paces Hal ordered the entire line to halt and to re-establish contact.

Considerable time was lost in this maneuver and there was considerable confusion. Nervousness encompassed Stubbs, who was bringing up the rear, although the others were still unaware of his presence.

The first line of barbed wire was cut and passed.

Then followed an endless groping progress across No Man's Land. At last the party came to the German entanglements and Hal put on a pair of rubber gloves. In his left hand he held a piece of steel, which he extended in front of him like a wand, fanning the air with it. As he came to the entanglement he probed the wire carefully, watching for an ensuing spark. For the Germans more than once had been known to electrify their wires.

But the wires to-night were not charged. With his pliers Hal started to cut a passage through.

As the first strand parted, Chester laid a warning hand on Hal's arm. At the same moment Chester touched the man next to him on the other side, and the latter passed the warning along.

Absolute silence followed.

Came the sound of footsteps, not the sound of cautious creeping, as the Yankees had advanced, but the steady, rhythmic footbeats of a body of marching men.

"They're coming this way!" Hal whispered to his chum.

"Right, Hal," Chester whispered back. "What shall we do?"

"They're not fifty paces off," muttered Hal. "That means they're Boches, of course. So near the German wire, our men would be either crawling or charging, not marching. It's a company, maybe a battalion, coming back from a reconnaissance and

making for a gap in their own wire. If we lie low they may pass."

He gave the order and the men threw themselves on the ground—all but Stubbs, who, uninstructed and unaware of the threatening danger, moved slowly forward.

On came the swinging tread of the Germans. Hal, listening breathlessly, tried to gauge the distance and the direction. He figured, presently, that the break in the wire the Germans were seeking could only be a few yards to the left of where he and his men lay. Thus the Germans must pass very close to the prostrate Americans—so close, perhaps, as to brush the nearest of them.

Hal whispered to Chester:

"Edge close to the wire. Pass the word."

Chester did so.

At this moment, Stubbs, advancing cautiously, saw a form prostrate before him. His heart leaped into his mouth, but he gave utterance to no exclamation. His quick mind told him that the Americans had halted because of some danger, and Stubbs threw himself quietly to the ground only a few steps behind the closest Yankee soldier. He lay perfectly quiet.

Having passed the word to creep closer to the wires, Hal began to execute the order in person. But he was the fraction of a second too late. The Germans moving in "hike" formation, with

“points” thrown out in advance and to either side—a point being a private soldier who for scouting and other purposes marches at some distance from the regular body—came on rapidly.

But still all might have gone well had it not been for Stubbs. As the man ahead of him moved closer toward the wire, Stubbs got to his hands and knees and crawled after him.

Suddenly the heavy heel of the German soldier advancing at the extreme left came down on Stubbs’ out-groping hand.

Stubbs’ too-taut nerves forced from his throat a yell that split the death-like stillness of the night. He sprang to his feet and grappled with the German, who, startled by the sudden scream, dropped his rifle and stepped back. Half way up, Stubbs’ feet went out from under him in the slimy mud, his feet caromed against the soldier, and he went flat on his back.

The German, apparently thinking he had stumbled upon a single enemy, stooped in the darkness, found his rifle, raised it aloft to dash out the brains of the man on the ground.

But before the upflung butt could descend, before Stubbs could get to his feet or dodge, the German soldier suddenly voiced a terrible scream. He dropped his gun and reeled backward, clutching at his own throat.

For out of the darkness something had launched

itself at him—something silent and terrible that had flown to Stubbs' aid.

Down on his back went the German with a crash, forgetting iron discipline in screech after screech of terror. He rolled against Stubbs, who promptly grappled with him again.

But even as he clawed at the Boche, Stubbs' nerves rang from him a second yell.

"Great Jerusalem!" he exclaimed. "Why didn't somebody tell me the Germans had taken to wearing fur instead of clothes!"

The Boche platoon was no longer striding forward in hike formation. It was broken up into masses of wildly running men, all of them bearing down on the spot where ensued the tumult. Stumbling, reeling and falling in the darkness they came on.

One of them loosed a rifle shot in the general direction of the yelling. A second and third German rifleman followed suit. From the distant American trenches a sniper or two began to pepper away toward the enemy lines, though the fog was too thick for them to see the enemy's rifle flashes.

The Boches farthest to the left in the blind rush fouled the wires. German snipers opened fire from behind the Hun parapets. A minute earlier the night had been still as the grave. Now it fairly crackled with clangor.

Hal, at the first cry in the night, sprang to his

feet and whipped out his automatic. In a flash he understood what had happened—even including Stubbs' part in the proceedings, for he had recognized the little war correspondent's voice. Also, Stubbs' reference to something wearing fur instead of clothes he understood perfectly. Wheeling, he called sharply.

"Wallace!"

Wallace, the big collie, had had a pleasant day with his friends in the American lines. At last, he had gone to sleep. He had awakened along toward midnight hungry and in a friendly mood. Wherefore he saillied forth in search of human companionship. He reached the front-line trenches just in time to see Hal and Chester and their ten men climbing over the top.

The dog also watched Stubbs as the little man crept after the soldiers. Wallace was not altogether sure that things were as they should be in view of Stubbs' furtive actions; he decided to investigate. He followed the war correspondent into the fog beyond.

Long before any of the reconnoitering men caught the sound of approaching German feet, Wallace caught not only the sound but the scent of the enemy platoon. The scent at once told him that the strangers were not of his own army.

Aliens were nearing his friends, his canine intelligence told him. And the dog's ruff began to

stand up. But Hal and the rest seemed in no way concerned; nor did Stubbs, though, to the dog's understanding, they must surely be aware of the approach. So Wallace gave no sign of displeasure.

But when the nearest German was almost upon them, and the Americans dropped suddenly to the ground, the collie became interested once more. A German stepped on Stubbs' hand, Stubbs yelled in pain; whereat the German made as if to strike Stubbs.

This was enough for Wallace. Without so much as a growl of warning, he jumped at the German's throat. Dog and man tumbled earthward together. Then, after an instant, Wallace felt Hal's fingers on his shoulder and heard the lad's voice.

With his other hand Hal reached down seized Stubbs by the coat and jerked him to his feet.

"You've just about spoiled everything," he growled, "but catch hold of my left arm here."

Stubbs obeyed without a word.

"Close up, Chester," cried Hal sharply. "Every man grab tight to the shoulder of the man on his left. Quick now!"

The men obeyed in silence.

"Now men," said Hal, "walk softly and swiftly and don't lose your hold no matter what happens. Not a sound. I'm leading the way, and Wallace will lead me."

In the instant of dire need Hal's quick brain had hit on the one possible way in which all might return safely to their own lines. There was a scramble as the men reached for one another.

Hal tightened his hold on Wallace's mane.

"Wallace," he said in a very low voice, "back to camp! Back to camp and keep quiet. Back to camp, boy."

Wallace whined softly. There was no doubt that he understood. He turned sharply about and moved off as swiftly as Hal's hand would permit.

"It's all right, Chester," Hal called over his shoulder in a low voice. "Just keep Stubbs in line, will you? We're safe enough now."

CHAPTER IV

STUBBS IN TROUBLE

HAL had no need to repeat his command so strenuously. Wallace understood at once what was expected of him. The word "camp" had been quite enough to tell him what to do.

Turning, he faced the American lines and tried to break into a gallop. His scent and knowledge of direction were all the guides he needed. A dog always relies on his nose first and his eyes afterward. The fog was no obstacle at all. Wallace

understood Hal's order and he set out at once to obey it.

But at the very first step he was checked. Hal did not release that feverishly tight hold on his mane, but merely shifted it to his collar. Wallace did not enjoy this mode of locomotion. It was inconvenient; and there was no sense in it, he told himself. The dog glanced back impatiently.

"Camp, boy!" said Hal again.

Wallace again turned toward the American lines, Hal still at his collar and an annoyingly hindering tail of men stumbling silently on behind.

All around were the Germans, seeking the Americans in the thickness of the impenetrable fog, swinging their rifles about like flails, shouting and occasionally firing their rifles. Now and then two or more of them collided in the darkness and wrestled in blind fury, each thinking his opponent was an American.

Impeded by their own blindly swarming numbers as much as by the fog, they sought their enemies. And but for Wallace they must soon have found what they sought. Even in compact form the Americans could not have had the luck to dodge every German—most of them between the fugitives and the American line.

But Wallace knew his work. It was bad enough to be handicapped by Hal's grasp on his collar. He was not minded to suffer further delay by running

into any of the groups of Germans between him and his goal. So he steered clear of such groups, making several wide detours in order to do so.

Once or twice he stopped short to let some of the Boches grope past him not half a dozen feet away. Again he veered sharply to the left, increasing his pace and forcing Hal and the others to increase theirs, to avoid a squad of thirty men who were quartering the field in close formation and who all but jostled the dog as they strode sightlessly by.

An occasional rifle spoke in the darkness. From both trench lines men were firing at venture. A few of the bullets sang close to Hal, Chester and the others. Everywhere was heard that shuffle and stumbling of many feet.

At last the noise of feet began to die away and the unevenly groping tread of the fugitives to sound more distinctly because of the lessening of the surrounding turmoil. In another few seconds Wallace came to a halt—not to an abrupt stop—but a leisurely checking of speed to denote he would go no farther with the load he was hauling.

Hal put out his free hand. It encountered the American wires. Wallace had stopped at the spot where the party had cut a narrow path through the entanglements on the outward journey. Alone, the dog could easily have passed through the gap, but he could not be certain of pulling Hal and the others after him. This was why he halted.

The last of the Americans scrambled to safety in the American front-line trenches. Hal went straight to Colonel Harlow, where he made his report.

Chester, in the meantime, awakened the company cook, who, after some argument, passed out a chunk of fried beef. Chester returned to where Wallace stood.

"Here you are, Wallace," he said, and offered the morsel. "The best in the shop is none too good for you."

Wallace did not so much as sniff at the meat. He looked at Chester coldly. Then, with ears laid close against his head in token of contempt, he marched away.

Chester was dumbfounded.

"Now, what do you think of that?" he demanded of no one in particular.

"Ha! Ha!" laughed a voice at his side.

Chester whirled upon the speaker, who was Stubbs.

"And what is so funny, may I ask?" demanded Chester with some heat.

"Why," said Stubbs, "it's only natural I should laugh when a dog turns up his nose at you. Ha! Ha!"

"Well, Mr. Stubbs," said Hal, who had approached in time to hear the little man's words, "you won't think it so funny when Colonel Harlow gets through with you."

"What's that?" demanded Stubbs in no little alarm. "Why, what has the colonel to do with me?"

"A whole lot, as you'll find," declared Hal. "He's pretty angry and I'm afraid you're in for a bad half hour, if not a week or so in the guardhouse."

"Good night!" muttered the little man to himself. Aloud he said: "What is the colonel angry with me for, Hal?"

"I guess it's only natural a man would be angry when somebody steps in and spoils all his plans," was the lad's reply. "Our recent mission was a failure, Mr. Stubbs, thanks to you."

"I know it," was Stubbs' reply, "and I'm sorry; but that's no reason you should have gone and told the colonel all about it. I suppose you did tell, didn't you?"

"Of course," said Hal simply.

"Well, I call that rather a shabby trick," declared Stubbs.

"But he had to tell, Stubbs," Chester interrupted.

"He did, did he? I'd like to know why. Seems to me I would help a friend out if he made a little mistake."

"I mentioned you in my report to the colonel, Stubbs," said Hal, "because I had to give the reason the reconnaissance was a failure. So now that you've caused all the trouble, you'll have to answer for it. Remember, I warned you against such foolishness."

"That's right!" exclaimed Stubbs angrily.

"You're one of those 'I told you so' fellows, are you? Well, I'll get even with you, or my name is not Anthony Stubbs."

"I'm not sure it will be when the colonel gets through with you," remarked Chester in a low voice, apparently meant only for Hal's ear.

"What's that?" demanded Stubbs, instantly alarmed again.

"As long as you heard me, I guess it isn't necessary to explain," returned Chester. "You know there are such things as firing squads in this army."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Stubbs. "You don't think the colonel will have me shot?"

"I didn't say so."

"I know you didn't; but you inferred it. But surely Colonel Harlow would never think of a thing like that!"

"It's hard telling what a colonel will think of when a civilian steps in and spoils one of his pet plans," declared Hal. "I'm glad I'm not in your boots, Mr. Stubbs."

"Maybe he won't need his boots much longer," muttered Chester.

Stubbs whirled on the lad angrily.

"Look here!" he cried. "Maybe you think that remark is funny, but I don't. From what Hal says, this is a serious matter. I am surprised that you make light of it."

"I meant no harm, Mr. Stubbs," Chester hastened

to say. "I really didn't mean for you to hear what I said. After this I shall keep my thoughts to myself."

Stubbs looked at the lad long and earnestly in the darkness. There was no sign of a smile on Chester's face. But from past experience, Stubbs could not be sure whether the lad was in earnest or not.

"Well," he grumbled at last, "I guess I am in for it; but I know as well as you boys do that the colonel can afford to take no strenuous measures. He may have me put under arrest or ordered away from the front. But he'll never dare order the death of an American war correspondent."

"Don't be too sure, Mr. Stubbs," Hal enjoined him. "I tell you the colonel was very angry. And, as I said before, it's a serious thing for a man, soldier or civilian, to commit any action that will hamper the operations of the army."

"By Jove! I hadn't thought of it in that way," declared Stubbs.

"You'll probably have some time for quiet reflection after your interview with the colonel," said Hal.

"What? Does he want to see me?"

"He certainly does. He instructed me to bring you to his quarters at once, if I had to call the corporal of the guard to round you up. So you may see that your presence is very much in demand."

"But it's three o'clock in the morning," Stubbs protested.

"Not quite, Mr. Stubbs," Chester corrected him. "But if I'm any judge, Colonel Harlow is not a man to bother about a little thing like the time."

"I guess I'd better go to the colonel's quarters at once, then," said Stubbs nervously.

"I certainly would advise you to do so," returned Hal grimly.

"Surely, Hal," Stubbs pleaded, "you'll put in a good word for me with the colonel."

"By Jove, Stubbs!" declared Hal. "That's what I call nerve. Here you go and mess up my little party, and then you've the effrontery to ask me to intercede for you."

"Come, now, Hal, don't talk like that," entreated Stubbs. "I know I did wrong, but I didn't mean any harm. I'll give you my word I'll be more careful in future."

"That doesn't alter the fact that you almost got us killed."

"I know it, Hal. I know it. But come on and be a good fellow now. I've helped you and Chester several times. Surely, you'll do as much for me?"

Hal appeared to turn the matter over in his mind.

"Well," he said at last, "I don't want to see you shot, and that's a fact. Besides, if the colonel ordered the extreme penalty, he might put me in charge of the firing squad, and that would be awk-

ward, to say the least. No, I wouldn't want to do that."

"By George, no!" Chester agreed. "I wouldn't want to do that either. Tell you what, Hal. Of course you may not be able to get Mr. Stubbs off Scot free, but you might recommend leniency."

"I guess that will be the best way," Hal said after a pause. "Yes, Mr. Stubbs, I'll use my influence in an effort to save your life. Come, now, we'd better be moving. The colonel is likely to send a guard after you."

Hal moved away and Stubbs followed him. The little man held his hat in his hand and his fingers played with the brim nervously.

"By George!" he exclaimed under his breath. "I wonder what the colonel will do with me?"

CHAPTER V

BOWERS DISCOVERS A PLOT

"CAPTAIN," said Sergeant Bowers to Chester, "will you have a look at my red shamrock?"

He tapped a small artificial flower pinned to his khaki coat.

"Very pretty, sergeant," replied Chester, "but you know it's against regulations to wear decorations in uniform. Where'd you get it?"

Sergeant Bowers laid a finger to his lips.

"S-sh-h!" he whispered. "Not so loud!"

"Why all the secrecy, sergeant?" demanded Chester. "You talk as though you were mixed up in a deep, dark conspiracy."

"That's just it, sir," said Bowers in a low voice. "I'm mixed up in some kind of a conspiracy, all right, and I don't know what it's all about exactly."

"Explain," said Chester briefly.

"I can't, sir; not right now, but if I may come to you in your quarters in half an hour I'll be glad to tell you all I know."

"Very well, sergeant. I shall expect you in half an hour."

Sergeant Bowers saluted and departed.

Chester made his way at once to his quarters, where he found Hal sprawled on a cot. He recounted his conversation and Hal was surprised.

"Wonder what it's all about?" he said.

"You've got me," Chester declared. "However, I guess we'll learn soon enough though. Certainly it can't be a very serious matter."

It was the afternoon of the day following the midnight sortie into No Man's Land—the sortie which had failed of its object because of Stubbs. The little war correspondent had had rather a stormy session with Colonel Harlow, who had at first ordered him under arrest for his uncalled-for activities. Later, however, the colonel had allowed Stubbs to go free on his promise to be more careful

in future, and upon the understanding that he was to leave the Chateau Thierry sector within the next few days.

When Stubbs and Hal left the colonel's quarters, the former had refused Hal's hospitality for the night, declaring that he was going to get his few belongings together at once and move to another quarter of the battlefield.

Hal did not see him the following morning, and drew the conclusion that Stubbs had kept his word.

Hal and Chester, alone in their quarters, now speculated upon the possible nature of the information Sergeant Bowers had to impart.

"Well, there is no use guessing," said Chester at last. "We've no possible means of telling what the sergeant has on his mind. We'll have to wait and hear what he has to say."

"Right," Hal agreed, "and, if I'm not mistaken, here he comes now."

A moment later the door was flung open and Sergeant Bowers stepped into the dugout.

"Have a seat, sergeant," said Hal. "Make yourself at home."

"Thank you, sir," replied the sergeant, and seated himself on the edge of a bunk across the room from the two boys.

"Now, sergeant," said Chester, "what's on your mind?"

"Considerable, sir," was the answer, "and I don't quite know what to make of it."

"Explain, sergeant."

"Well," began Sergeant Bowers, "as you must have guessed, there is a streak of Irish in me a mile wide."

"That is perfectly plain, sergeant," said Hal. "But what has that to do with this dark plot?"

"I don't know exactly," said the sergeant, "but it must have something to do with it. As I was on my way to my quarters last night, a man brushed against me and slipped something into my hand. It was quite dark, so I couldn't make out his features. I wouldn't know him again if I saw him, although I feel sure I would recognize his voice."

"Oh, he spoke, then," interrupted Chester.

"Yes, sir. 'Wear this, brother,' he said to me, 'that we may know you are one of us. Await the word and say nothing.'"

"What word?" I asked him.

"'Erin,' he replied, and disappeared in the darkness. That's all that I know, sir."

"And what was it he slipped into your hand, sergeant?" asked Hal.

"This shamrock, sir."

"I had surmised as much," said Chester. "Well, what do you make of it, sergeant?"

"I don't know, sir, but there must be something wrong some place."

"I guess it isn't as deep a mystery as all that," declared Hal. "I believe I can see through it, all right."

"You can, sir?" exclaimed Bowers eagerly. "What is it, sir?"

"Why," replied Hal, "I should judge that a few of your misguided Irish brothers have taken this occasion to form a society of some sort with a view toward freeing Ireland from British dominion."

"That might not be such a bad job, sir," declared Bowers. "But what hope has such a movement for success in a place like this?"

"Not much, very likely," replied Hal, "but the movement was probably started as the result of German intrigue. While the enemy may not expect a whole lot from this conspiracy, they undoubtedly see a possibility of stirring up enough dissension to make a little trouble."

"Hadn't we better bring the matter to the attention of Colonel Harlow at once?" asked Chester.

"I suppose so," said Hal. "At the same time we haven't enough evidence to take any action. Now we've the rest of the day and to-night before we start for Rheims to report to General Haan. Suppose we spook about a bit and see how many of these red shamrocks we can spot?"

"Not a bad idea," Chester declared. He turned to Bowers. "Sergeant," he said, "how'd you like

to lend me your shamrock for the rest of the afternoon?"

"Why, you can have it for all me, sir," replied Bowers.

He unfastened the shamrock and passed it to Chester, who pinned it to the lapel of his own coat.

"Maybe I can dig up a little information myself," the lad said.

"Better be careful, sir," the sergeant warned. "There may be some desperate men mixed up in this thing."

"They'll find I'm desperate, too, if they fool with me," said Chester grimly. "Now, Hal, suppose you and Bowers spend the rest of the day walking about the camp. I don't believe you'll find many men among the American forces wearing a red shamrock, but there probably will be a lot of them among the British army if the movement has been in existence very long. However, it would be well to make a note of every man wearing a shamrock."

"All right," said Hal, "but you'd better be careful, Chester."

"Oh, I'll be careful enough, never fear," returned Chester.

He left the dugout. Hal and Bowers went out a few minutes later.

During the afternoon Hal saw but two red shamrocks, and when Bowers reported to the lad that night he had the name of only one man.

"Has Captain Crawford been back yet, sir?" he asked.

"Not yet," replied Hal, "but I guess he will be here presently."

But eight o'clock came with no sign of Chester, and then nine. Hal began to grow uneasy.

"I'm afraid he's got into trouble," he said to Bowers at last. "I believe I'd better go and look for him."

"Can't see how he could get in trouble in the heart of the American army, sir," declared Bowers.

"Nor I," Hal agreed. "But he should have returned long before this."

"Trouble is," said Bowers, "that we don't know where to look for him."

"That's true," said Hal. "I guess it will do no good to start a search to-night, but if he has not returned by morning something must be done."

"I'll report to you immediately after inspection, then, sir," said Bowers.

He saluted and took his departure. Hal, still fully dressed, threw himself on his bunk and sought a much needed repose.

In the meantime, what of Chester?

After leaving Hal and Bowers he walked about the large camp for several hours without catching sight of a single red shamrock. It grew dusk and Chester was about to return to his quarters when, a short distance away, he saw a man turn into a

small dugout and quickened his pace. The lad felt sure, even in the semi-darkness, that he had distinguished a small red shamrock on the soldier's coat.

Without an instant's hesitation, Chester threw the door open and stepped inside. The occupant of the room whirled about suddenly at the sound of Chester's footsteps and dropped a hand to his revolver. Chester saw that the man was a captain of infantry.

A little piece of red pinned to the captain's left lapel showed Chester that his eyes had not played him false. The lad laid a finger to his lips as he advanced into the room.

"Erin!" said Chester in a low voice.

The occupant of the dugout let his hand fall from his revolver and seemed to breathe easier.

"Erin!" he repeated after Chester.

"Your name, if you please, captain?" asked Chester.

"McGuillcudy," replied the other; "and yours?"

"Crawford."

"'Tis not an Irish name," said McGuillcudy, half suspiciously.

"Possibly not," smiled Chester. "The name is my father's. My mother's maiden name was something else."

"I see," said the other. "But a man in my position can't be too careful, you know."

"Of course," agreed Chester. "At the same time, captain, I wear the badge of our order, and I have the password. It should be enough."

"Possibly," was the reply, "but these are queer times. A man never knows when he is safe."

"Right again, captain," said Chester, and added to himself: "And you are not half as safe as you think you are, Captain McGuillcudy."

"Well, sir," said Captain McGuillcudy at length, "to what am I indebted for the honor of this visit?"

"Nothing very important, captain. I just wanted to make sure that I have the proper date for our next meeting."

McGuillcudy again eyed the lad suspiciously.

"Don't you know the date?" he demanded.

"I'm not sure," said Chester. "My memory tells me that it is to-morrow night at eight o'clock."

"You're wrong, sir," declared McGuillcudy. "The time is eight o'clock this evening."

"Same rendezvous?"

"Yes; in Captain O'Brien's quarters. You'll be there?"

"Yes. And you?"

"Of course."

"Very well. I'll see you later," and Chester took his departure.

CHAPTER VI

THE RENDEZVOUS

"BY GEORGE!" said Chester to himself when he was again outside, "I appear to have struck a lead. Wonder if Hal and Bowers have had as much luck. I don't suppose they have, though, for I had the advantage with this red shamrock of Bowers'."

He walked as he talked to himself back toward the little dugout he shared with Hal, but after he had taken perhaps a dozen paces he halted suddenly.

"Suppose McGuillcudy was trying to throw me off the track," he muttered. "Besides, I don't know a Captain O'Brien and it might not be healthy to go around asking for him; it might put him on his guard. Then, too, neither do I know the manner of entrance, providing the meeting is to be held in Captain O'Brien's quarters. Guess the best thing for me to do is to stick around and follow McGuillcudy when he goes out."

Accordingly, the lad loitered about in the vicinity of McGuillcudy's dugout.

"Quarter to eight," he said after a time, consulting his watch by the flare of a match. "He should be starting presently."

The words were hardly out of his mouth when a figure stole quietly from McGuillcudy's quarters.

Chester, although unable to distinguish the man's features in the darkness, felt sure it was McGuillcudy and he followed the figure at a safe distance.

The man wound in and out along the improvised streets of the American camp and at last brought up before a tent well back from the front. He lifted the flap and entered without announcing himself. Chester took a position a short distance away and waited.

From time to time other figures flitted by him in the darkness and entered what Chester took to be Captain O'Brien's tent. Then, for a long interval, no figures arrived.

"Guess I might as well go in," Chester told himself. "I can't learn anything out here. I should be safe enough, considering that I have my red shamrock and know the password. Here goes."

He walked toward the tent firmly, lifted the flap and entered.

Inside perhaps a dozen men were gathered about a small table in the center of the tent. They looked up at Chester's entrance, glanced sharply at the red shamrock on his coat, and waited expectantly.

Chester realized that something was expected of him. He believed he knew what it was.

"Erin!" he said quietly.

There was an audible breath of relief from the others. Then McGuillcudy, who was sitting next

to the man that Chester had signalled out as Captain O'Brien, spoke.

"Come in, Crawford," he said.

Chester needed no further urging. The others made room for him at the table.

"I take it," said McGuillcudy, "that you have met none of the others?"

"Right," said Chester quietly.

"Then," demanded the man whom Chester had rightly surmised to be Captain O'Brien, "what are you doing here?"

Again Chester thought quickly.

"Why," he said at last, "my friend Sergeant Bowers, whom I judge you all know from the fact that one of you presented him with a red shamrock, sent me as his emissary. Because of other duties he is unable to be present to-night."

"Is this man Bowers to be trusted?" asked Captain O'Brien of McGuillcudy.

"I am sure he is," was the reply. "I gave him the shamrock myself, and you know I am not in the habit of making mistakes. I have had several talks with him, and I am sure that he wishes the freedom of Ireland as much as any of us."

"And you, sir?" demanded Captain O'Brien of Chester.

"Else why should I be here?" demanded Chester. "I'll tell you. Sergeant Bowers and I are close friends. When, unsolicited, he found himself a

member of this order, he was quick enough to figure out what it meant. Knowing my sentiments as he did, he wished me to join and I consented."

"And the shamrock you wear?" asked O'Brien.

"It's Bowers'," replied Chester. "But I want to say something else," the lad added, "and it is this: Both Bowers and myself, while we are willing to do whatever we may to help Ireland, will enlist in no movement that will connect us with the Germans."

The other men in the room exchanged sharp glances. Then Captain O'Brien said quickly:

"I assure you such a thing is far from our thoughts."

"Very well, then," said Chester, "I'm with you. Now, I take it, there is something you will require of me to prove my sincerity?"

Captain O'Brien nodded.

"Of course we cannot accept you on faith," he said. "Even now you probably know too much. If you were to tell what you know, you could make it pretty hot for us. But we are going to make sure that you don't do that."

"I'm perfectly willing to be put to the test," said Chester.

"Very well," said Captain O'Brien. "Sign this paper."

He extended a sheet of foolscap to Chester. The lad looked at it and found it to be perfectly blank.

"Why?" he said, and looked up.

Then he understood.

Levelled squarely at his temple and within six inches of it was an ugly-looking automatic. It was held in the steady hand of McGuillcudy, who had stepped close as Chester glanced at the paper O'Brien had given him.

"What's the meaning of this?" Chester demanded sharply.

"The meaning," said O'Brien quietly, "is that we are not such fools as you would have us believe."

"What do you mean?" asked Chester.

"Now don't try to play the innocent. The name of Captain Chester Crawford is too well known for me not to recognize you. And I know that your are heart and soul with America and England in this war. We, as you know, are for Ireland first, no matter how far we must go to attain our ends—even to an alliance with the Germans. Knowing this as we do, surely you cannot expect us to allow you to leave here alive?"

Then, for the first time, Chester realized that he had put his head into the lion's mouth.

"What a fool I am," he told himself. Aloud he said:

"But you can't shoot me here, you know. One shot would arouse the whole camp. You can't get away with that."

"Oh, we're not going to shoot you," said McGuill-

cudy. "There are easier ways of killing a man, you may be sure."

"There are for the Germans," Chester agreed, "but I had no idea we had such apt pupils in the American army."

"If you were to live long enough," said O'Brien, "you'd find we have many things in the American army."

"Such as cowards and traitors, eh?" said Chester with a faint smile.

O'Brien shrugged his shoulders.

"Names won't hurt us," he replied. "Now, McGuillcudy, do your work."

In response to this command, McGuillcudy suddenly reversed his revolver and leaped forward.

But Chester had been expecting some such move and he was prepared for it. The lad realized that he was in a desperate situation and he was determined to put up the best argument he could.

As McGuillcudy stepped forward and brought the butt of his revolver down, Chester leaped quickly aside, thus avoiding the blow that otherwise must have cracked his skull. McGuillcudy, thrown off his balance, stumbled. Chester jumped forward quickly and kicked the man in the shin. Down went McGuillcudy.

In the meantime others in the room leaped forward, thinking to overpower Chester. But stepping quickly backward, Chester suddenly produced

a pair of automatics with which he covered them.

"Stay where you are!" he said sharply. "Stop there, O'Brien! Don't think that I won't shoot if I have to. I've nothing to fear by betraying our presence, you know. One false move and down you go; and you'll be the first one, too, O'Brien."

O'Brien glowered at the lad.

"I'll get you for this," he declared.

"Oh, no you won't," said Chester with a smile. "I predict a courtmartial for you, O'Brien, and for your friends, with a firing squad as a fitting end for the bunch of you. And it would give me great pleasure to direct the fire of that squad."

O'Brien's face was a deathly white. His fingers twitched nervously. Chester knew that, in spite of the fact that he had the man covered, O'Brien was turning over in his mind the possible chances of escape. So, when O'Brien suddenly dropped to the floor, Chester was ready for him.

"Crack!" went the lad's revolver.

The shot was followed by a howl of anguish from O'Brien, who grovelled on the floor.

Chester's revolvers swept from right to left as he continued to cover the other occupants of the room.

"Careful now," he warned them. "The next man to make a move dies. Now, O'Brien, get up from there. Be a man and stop that groaning. You're

not badly hurt. Just a scratch in the shoulder. I didn't shoot to kill, but I will next time."

O'Brien got to his feet and faced Chester with an evil look in his eye.

"I'll get even with you for this," he shouted.

"Silence!" cried Chester. "Here, if I am not mistaken, comes the corporal of the guard and enough loyal soldiers to take charge of the rest of you."

Came the sound of rapidly approaching footsteps without. A moment later a corporal poked his head in the tent.

"What's the matter here?" he demanded.

"Arrest these men, corporal," said Chester quietly. "They are enemies and traitors."

"I protest!" exclaimed McGuillcudy. "Arrest that man. I demand it."

The corporal stopped and scratched his head.

"You know me, corporal," said Chester quietly. "I'll take the responsibility."

"I say arrest him!" shouted O'Brien, pointing to Chester.

"I'll be hanged if I know what to do," declared the corporal, still scratching his head, "but I know there is something wrong here. I'll take the responsibility of arresting the whole batch of you. Surround them, men."

"Look here, corporal," stuttered McGuillcudy, "you can't arrest your superior officer."

"Can't I?" demanded the corporal, an angry light in his eye. "I'll show you. Now then, right about! Forward, march!"

CHAPTER VII

THE COURTMARTIAL

It was almost midnight when Chester returned to his own quarters. After he and the conspirators had been placed under arrest by the corporal, the latter had sent a hurry call for Colonel Harlow, who appeared in the guard house in a very few minutes.

To say that he was astonished by the story Chester unfolded to him is to put it mildly. Chester outlined what he knew of the plot in detail, beginning with his original conversation with Sergeant Bowers.

"It might be well, sir," he concluded, "to send for Sergeant Bowers and have him verify what I say."

"It is not necessary," declared Colonel Harlow. "I have implicit faith in you, captain. Besides, these men have guilt written on their faces. I shall call a courtmartial to sit in the morning. That means, Captain Crawford, that you will find it necessary to postpone your journey to Rheims until this matter has been disposed of."

"Very well, sir," said Chester.

"That is all, then. You have done well and are entitled to a good night's rest. Report to me in the morning at eight o'clock."

"Thank you, sir," said Chester, saluted and took his departure.

Hal awoke as his chum entered the room.

"Where in the world have you been?" he demanded.

"Out rounding up the conspirators," said Chester with a grin.

"Good!" said Hal. "Did you learn anything?"

"Rather," replied Chester dryly. "To tell the truth, I found a whole lot, and Captain O'Brien, Captain McGuillcudy and a dozen other officers and privates with good old Irish names are in the guard-house as a result. They'll be courtmartialed in the morning."

Hal listened to this in open-eyed astonishment.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed. "You don't mean to tell me you have done all that single-handed?"

"Well, I found 'em single-handed. I had assistance in getting them to the guardhouse."

"Hadn't you better inform the colonel at once?"

"Thanks for the advice. But that has all been attended to while you slept."

"By Jove! It's too bad!" declared Hal. "I wouldn't have missed all that for the world."

"You did miss quite a little fun, and that's a fact," said Chester. "However, you may get a chance to

say something at the courtmartial. You'll probably be called upon to corroborate what Sergeant Bowers told us."

"So thus endeth the conspiracy," said Hal, half to himself.

Chester started.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "I don't know whether it does or not. That's a feature I hadn't thought of. I have been so engrossed in this one matter that I hadn't stopped to think that other men are probably mixed up in it. The job's not half complete yet."

"Well," said Hal, "I judge the necessary information can be wormed out of one of the conspirators at the courtmartial in the morning. What time does it sit?"

"I don't know, but I'm to report to Colonel Harlow at eight o'clock. Guess you'd better go along."

"And Bowers," Hal agreed. "I suppose this means that we won't start for Rheims to-morrow?"

"That's just what it means. However, the difference of a day won't matter a whole lot, I guess."

"No, I guess not. But in the meantime, let's get a little sleep."

Hal, Chester and Bowers reported to Colonel Harlow promptly at eight o'clock the following morning. The colonel received them at once.

"I've called a courtmartial for ten o'clock," he informed them. "I believe these matters should be

disposed of without loss of time and as quietly as possible."

"Have you managed to learn the names of other men connected with this conspiracy, sir?" asked Chester.

Colonel Harlow looked at the lad sharply.

"By George!" he said at last, "there is a thing that has never entered my head. I'm glad you spoke of it. I'll see what can be done at the trial. By the way, I'll need you all as witnesses. The courtmartial will sit here. You may go now, if you wish, but return soon before ten o'clock."

It was a few minutes past ten o'clock when the prisoners were marched into the room, under heavy guard. The men who were to decide their fate sat at a long table in one end of the room. Hal, Chester and Bowers, the only witnesses besides the corporal who had made the arrests, sat close by.

Captain O'Brien was the first man called before the tribunal. He denied his guilt, as did the others one by one.

Then Bowers was called to the stand. He related in a few words the manner in which he had come into possession of the red shamrock and told of the conversation, and then Chester related the incidents leading up to the capture of the plotters.

The courtmartial was in session less than an hour, and it took the judges less than five minutes to reach a verdict of guilty and to prescribe a fitting punish-

ment. Colonel Harlow read the verdict aloud. It was death.

The prisoners heard the verdict in silence. There was no sign of fear in their faces.

"They are undoubtedly brave men, all," Hal whispered to Chester. "It's too bad their courage was not used in the right direction."

Following the reading of the verdict, Colonel Harlow addressed the prisoners.

"You men have been found guilty after fair and impartial trial," he said, "and have been ordered to pay the extreme penalty. But I offer life to the first of you who will tell me the manner in which this conspiracy was hatched, the name of your leader and whatever other details are necessary to the apprehension of all the plotters and the crushing of the conspiracy."

There was silence among the prisoners. In not a single face was there evidence that one of them would betray his fellows.

"Come, come," said Colonel Harlow after a pause. "I cannot wait long for you to decide. O'Brien, will you give the information I seek?"

"No!" was O'Brien's firm reply.

"How about you, Lieutenant Shea?" asked the colonel.

"No!"

So the colonel went down the line until he reached Captain McGuillcudy.

"And how about you, McGuillcudy?" he asked.

"I—I——" the latter stammered.

"Yes, yes, McGuillcudy," the colonel pressed his advantage. "It is your life that is at stake, you know."

"Silence, McGuillcudy!" exclaimed Captain O'Brien. "Don't be a coward and traitor."

"Remove the other prisoners," ordered Colonel Harlow, "and let the sentence of the courtmartial be carried out before the sun has set."

A hush fell over the room as all the prisoners but Captain McGuillcudy were marched away.

"Now, McGuillcudy," said Colonel Harlow, when the others had gone. "Will you give me the information I desire?"

McGuillcudy's face was the color of ashes. It seemed that he could not decide either way. But suddenly he took his resolution and said slowly:

"Yes, sir!"

"Good," said Colonel Harlow. "Now, who is the ringleader of this conspiracy? What's his name?"

"Rogers, sir," was the reply. "An Englishman."

"Surely," exclaimed Colonel Harlow, "you don't mean Colonel Arnold Rogers of the Irish brigade?"

"The same, sir," said McGuillcudy.

A murmur of astonishment ran through the room.

In brief words now McGuillcudy described his connection with the plotters and told all that he knew of the conspirators.

"And can you give me proof of all this?" asked Colonel Harlow at last.

"No, sir, I cannot, but I can put you in the way of getting the proof."

"How?"

"Keep this matter quiet, sir. Allow no word of it to spread through the American army, for thus it may reach the British. On Wednesday night, which is two days from to-day, there will be a meeting of the arch plotters—Colonel Rogers and delegates from the various armies and divisions—at Rheims. I can furnish you with the number of the house. If you will have the house surrounded, you may catch the plotters red-handed."

"And how do you know all this, sir?" demanded Colonel Harlow.

"Well," said McGuillcudy hesitatingly, "I was to be the delegate from our division, sir. I have already applied for and been granted five days' furlough."

"And how may we obtain admission to this council?" asked the colonel.

"If you can keep these arrests quiet, as I suggest," replied McGuillcudy, "I can furnish you with papers that will admit a man in my stead. The rest will be up to him and you."

"Very good, McGuillcudy," said Colonel Harlow. "You shall be taken at your word. Now, where may I find the papers of which you speak?"

"In my quarters, sir, in a small hole in the wall behind my cot."

"I'll send for them, now. What is their nature?"

"They certify that the bearer is the authorized delegate of our division, sir."

"Very good. Captain Paine, will you go to McGillcudy's quarters and get the papers?"

Hal saluted and hurried out. There was absolute silence in the colonel's quarters until the lad returned five minutes later. Hal passed the papers to Colonel Harlow, who scanned them hurriedly.

"Correct," he said at last. "Now, the matter remains as to who shall take these papers to General Haan at Rheims, that he may take the necessary steps to apprehend Rogers and the other conspirators."

Hal approached and saluted.

"If you please, sir," he said, "Captain Crawford and myself already have been ordered to report to General Haan. We should be glad to deliver the papers, sir."

"Very well," was the colonel's reply, "and I shall make it a point to tell the general that you will be glad to be in at the finish, and that you are entitled to be. Now, gentlemen," turning again to the officers who had comprised the courtmartial, "you have heard me promise the prisoner here his life for certain information, which he has given. But his crime

is still too serious to go unpunished. Will you say what his punishment shall be?"

"Life imprisonment!" said a voice, and others took it up.

"So be it," said Colonel Harlow. "Prisoner, you have heard the verdict."

McGuillcudy dropped his head on his breast. His answer was very low:

"Yes; but why did I betray my friends? Why did I not accept the fate of my companions!"

CHAPTER VIII

RHEIMS

THE city of Rheims is one of the most important in the whole of the French Republic. Situated on the river Vesle almost a hundred miles to the north and east of Chateau Thierry, it had been the scene of some of the most severe fighting of the war.

Several times this picturesque and historic city had been in the hands of the Germans, who had been driven out again only at fearful cost to the Allies. Time after time the city had been bombarded by the huge enemy guns, until parts of it now were mere wreckage. In Rheims the one historic building that so far had escaped the hail of high explosive shells, whether accidentally or through some unexplained qualms of conscience on

the part of the German general staff no one knows, was the vast and magnificent cathedral—probably the most pretentious structure of its kind in the world. German shells had played before, behind and all around it, but the cathedral itself had not been touched.

Under the shelter of this cathedral Major General William C. Haan, U. S. A., had his headquarters, commanding the Thirty-second American division in France. For the most part, his troops were comprised of National Army men from Michigan and Wisconsin, although there was a fair sprinkling of regulars among them.

To General Haan with dispatches and the papers furnished by Captain McGuillcudy went Hal and Chester two days after the courtmartial conducted by Colonel Harlow at Chateau Thierry. General Haan received them immediately.

"I have had word of your coming," said General Haan. "I have been in communication by telephone with Colonel Harlow, who informs me that you are the bearers of important papers, the nature of which could not be mentioned over the wire."

Hal, who bore the papers, bowed.

"Yes, sir," he said.

He put a hand into his breast pocket, produced the papers and passed them to the general. The latter, before glancing at the documents, spoke again.

"I have also had word of you from the com-

mander-in-chief," he said. "When I informed General Pershing that I had need of two more officers on my staff, he replied instantly that he had the very young men in mind. I judge, from the fact that you have been assigned here, that you will soon be advanced in rank."

Hal and Chester bowed, but said nothing.

"I may say," continued General Haan, "that I shall have need of brave and trustworthy officers, and I know General Pershing would not have detailed you here could you not live up to those requirements. We have important work ahead of us—important and hard—and it is coming soon."

"You mean an advance, sir, I take it," replied Hal. General Haan nodded.

"Exactly," he replied. "You are, I suppose, not unfamiliar with the lay of the land here. To the east is Florent and still farther east the Argonne forest. Beyond this the Germans must be driven at all hazards. My plans are made. I now am only awaiting the word, which I expect momentarily. You may or may not know that General Pershing has asked Marshal Foch to give the American troops a position where they may do their full share in driving the enemy back. This is Marshal Foch's answer. The Americans at this moment are holding the most important position on the whole battleline. A victory here and in the Argonne will be decisive. It will do more toward winning the war than any

single action that has been fought. A defeat would be disastrous."

"There will be no defeat, sir!" declared Chester.

General Haan brought his fist down on his desk with a crash.

"That's the spirit that will win for us!" he exclaimed. "Now, you young men may amuse yourselves while I glance at these papers you have brought. I judge their contents must be very important."

He broke the seal and spread open the documents. As he read his brow grew dark and his hands twitched nervously. But by no other sign could the lads tell the anger that gripped him.

Slowly he laid the papers down on his desk again and for a moment was lost in thought. Then, suddenly, his fist crashed again to the table and he jumped to his feet.

"So!" he exclaimed. "We have traitors in the very heart of our army! The cunning Hun has shot his poison here! Well, he'll be surprised at the outcome!"

Gradually the general's anger died down. For a few moments he seemed to have forgotten the presence of Hal and Chester. But when he spoke to them again his voice was cold and hard and very quiet.

"Colonel Harlow informs me," he said, looking at Chester, "that it was you who discovered this

plot, captain, and brought the traitors in his regiment to justice. He says that both you young officers may be depended upon to the limit—that I may have the utmost faith in your courage and resourcefulness. Very good. I shall take his advice and avail myself of your services.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Chester quietly.

Again the general scanned the documents some moments before speaking.

“The conspirators will meet in Rheims to-night,” he said. “And here is the address of their rendezvous. This paper,” and he passed it to Chester, “will admit you to their den. Will you go?”

“Yes, sir,” replied Chester.

“Very good. Now the only necessity I can see of your presence there is that you may get enough evidence to convict them. Should I raid the place, it is possible that all incriminating evidence might be destroyed before my men could reach the conspirators. If you can get any papers, so much the better; but if not, you will at least hear enough to stand these men before a firing squad.”

Again General Haan was lost in thought for some moments. Then he continued:

“The meeting will start at nine o’clock. Very good. You, Captain Crawford, will be there. I will have the house surrounded soon after that. At half past ten o’clock, my troops will break down the doors. You, probably, will be captured with the

rest. If the conspirators show fight, it would be well for you to conceal yourself if possible. Otherwise you may be killed. My troops will not be able to tell you from the others. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly, sir."

"Good. Now let me see. It is possible that Rogers or one of his henchmen will have a list of the most important men connected with the conspiracy. If you could get this it would help. I could send it broadcast throughout the British and American armies and we could round up practically every man in the movement. If you see an opportunity to get such a list, secure it at all hazards."

"Very well, sir."

"I guess that is all." He clapped his hands together vigorously. An orderly entered.

"Orderly," said General Haan, "see that quarters are provided at once for Captains Paine and Crawford."

The orderly saluted and motioned for the lads to follow him. As the two were about to leave the room, the general said to Chester:

"It will not be necessary for you to report to me again, Captain Crawford. I depend upon you to be at the rendezvous at the appointed time. If you can get the list, get it. My men will enter the house at precisely half past ten. Good day, sirs!"

Fifteen minutes later Hal and Chester found themselves in a large and well-appointed room in

the same house in which General Haan had his headquarters. They were tired out from the long ride from Chateau Thierry and at Hal's suggestion they decided to pass the hours until evening in sleep.

"You'll need all the sleep you can get, Chester," declared Hal. "By Jove! You're having all the luck. Now why couldn't I get in on this expedition?"

Chester grinned.

"I can remember the times that you were the lucky one," he replied. "Turn about is fair play, you know."

"Maybe so," said Hal, "but I've been trying to figure out a way whereby I can get into the den tonight, too. I might be able to help you out if you should get in trouble."

"I wouldn't think of it, Hal," said Chester. "I've credentials for myself, and you haven't. If I tried to take you with me I might be suspected."

"That's true enough. By George! I can forge the mate to that paper you have!"

"I wouldn't do that."

"Why not?"

"Well, what's the use? There's a chance it might get you through, all right, but there is also the chance that it might not, in which case the plotters would smell a rat and be on their guard. No, I guess you will have to stay behind this time."

"But I don't want to stay behind," protested Hal.

"We don't always get what we want in this world," said Chester sententiously.

"I know it. That's what I'm kicking about."

"Well, it can't be helped this time. Of course, I'd like to have you go, but I'm afraid it's impossible."

"By Jove! I've a good mind to put it up to the general," declared Hal.

"I wouldn't do that, either," said Chester.

Hal gazed at his chum with a suspicion of anger in his eyes.

"I see you're determined to hog all the glory," he said.

"Glory?" repeated Chester. "I'm not doing this for glory, you know."

"Of course," Hal hastened to say. "Forgive me, Chester. I didn't mean it. I'm just a little put out, that's all. Here I have been hoping right along that I could be in at the finish and now I find I've got to cool my heels outside."

"Tell you what," said Chester. "Maybe the general will arrange so that you can go with the men who are to break in."

"By George! I hadn't thought of that," declared Hal. "I'm certainly going to ask him."

"Well, you go ahead. In the meantime I'm going to take a little snooze. I'll leave it to you to see that I'm called by seven o'clock. That will give me plenty of time to get to the rendezvous. If you're

up at that hour you can call me; if not leave word with the orderly to be sure that we're routed out by seven at least."

"All right," said Hal. "You turn in now. I'll attend to the rest of it. But I'm going to get into this game some way if it's humanly possible, you can bet on that."

He left the room quickly, slamming the door behind him. Fully dressed as he was, Chester tumbled into the clean, white bed and soon was fast asleep.

CHAPTER IX

THE ROUND-UP

FIVE minutes of nine o'clock found Chester on a corner a short half a block from the rendezvous of the conspirators.

"Think I'll walk past once and get an idea of the lay of the land," the lad told himself.

He did so. Opposite the building whose number corresponded with the one which the lad had memorized, he glanced up. The rendezvous was a two-story brick building. A short flight of marble steps led to the front entrance. On the first floor there were two windows on either side of the door. The same was true of the second story. This indicated that there was a room on each side of the hall both downstairs and up. How many rooms there were

back of these Chester had, of course, no means of telling.

On the next corner Chester glanced at his watch again.

"Three minutes to nine," he muttered. "Time to go in."

He felt of his revolvers in his pockets and it made him a deal more comfortable.

A man walked down the street ahead of him.

"Probably one of the plotters," Chester told himself. "I'll stick close. There may be some red tape about getting in that I know nothing about."

The lad was still in uniform. He had not felt called upon to change, for as the conspirators were all army men, it was more than probable that all would attend the meeting in full regalia. Chester perceived that the man just ahead of him also wore a uniform.

As Chester had expected, the man ahead of him mounted the steps and tapped gently on the door. Chester was close behind him. The man, who was in the uniform of a lieutenant in the British army, glanced at Chester sharply as the lad mounted the steps, but he said nothing. The lad perceived that on his coat the man wore a red shamrock. Chester was thankful that he had not forgotten his.

After a moment's wait, the door swung inward and the British officer entered. Chester followed him closely.

"Erin!" said the Briton.

"Your paper?" said the man just inside the door.

The Briton produced a paper similar to the one Chester carried and passed it over. The man at the door scanned it quickly and then said:

"Pass!"

"Erin!" said Chester, as he found the man at the door blocking his passage.

"Your paper?" was the reply.

Chester extended his document, which the man scanned as briefly as he had the other.

"Pass!" came the word and Chester stepped inside. The door closed behind him.

Inside Chester saw that his surmise as to the interior of the house had been correct. A door led to the left of the hall and another to the right. Farther back on either side Chester saw two more doors. Besides these, there was also what Chester took to be a rear door at the end of the hall.

In the rear room on the left Chester heard the sound of voices. He moved in that direction. He laid a hand on the knob and opened the door. Inside was a dense cloud of tobacco smoke and for a moment Chester was unable to distinguish the faces of the men within. While he tried to pierce the smoke with his eyes a man approached and laid a hand on his arm.

"Glad to see you, brother," he said. "Your name, and where are you from?"

"McGuillcudy," replied Chester. "From the —st marines at Chateau Thierry."

On his way to the rendezvous Chester had turned over in his mind the advisability of giving his right name should it be requested. It was hardly possible, he knew, that it would make much difference, but he had concluded that to be on the safe side it would be as well to assume McGuillcudy's identity. Nor, the lad thought, was there much probability that he would encounter any one he knew nor any one familiar with his own name.

"Glad you've come, McGuillcudy," repeated the man who had approached Chester. "Come and meet the rest of the crowd. Men," he added, "meet Captain McGuillcudy from Chateau Thierry."

The introduction was acknowledged in various ways.

Now Chester made out that at one end of the room was a rather large table. At the head of it sat a man of prodigious height and breadth. He had black, piercing eyes and wore a mustache and heavy beard.

"Rogers, or I'm a poor prophet," Chester told himself.

The lad was right. This man was indeed Colonel Arnold Rogers, the ringleader of the conspiracy.

"Well, are we all here?" he growled.

"I guess so, sir," replied a man sitting on his left.

"At all events, no one is likely to come now. It's past the hour of meeting."

"Then let's get down to business," said Rogers. He glanced around the room from beneath shaggy eyebrows, and continued: "Has every man here produced proper credentials?"

"Yes, sir," replied the man who had stopped Chester at the door.

"Then there can be no spies here," declared Rogers. "Now, there is no use wasting time, so I'll put my proposition before you in a few words, and we can vote on it. Is it agreed?"

There were exclamations of assent from among the almost two score men in the room.

"Good!" said Rogers. "Then here it is: I have an offer of the Imperial German government to supply us with all the money we need—all the weapons, ammunition and supplies if, when the enemy attacks at Rheims four days from to-day, we can make sure that the British and American resistance is broken down. Of course, the first thing we want is money. Even now, Sir Sydney Fallon is raising a strong fighting force in Dublin. All he needs is money. When this is supplied, and the arms and the ammunition, I have the promise of Germany that her high seas fleet will run the blockade and land a heavy force in Ireland. With this we can beat back the English and the German advance in

France will continue. That's the proposition in a nutshell."

"But," said a voice from the crowd, "how do you propose to break down the Allied resistance when the Germans advance four days from to-day?"

"Simple," was the reply. "Surely there are enough of us here to see that something happens to the big guns and the rifles and the ammunition. Then, besides us, there are the men whom we represent."

"That's all right," was the reply, "but why do the delegates from so far away have to be consulted in what concerns Rheims alone?"

"Because," was the reply, "it must be understood that we are united. All true sons of Ireland must understand the situation thoroughly. All the patriots in our organization must be made to understand why a certain thing is done. In this way we will stand united always and there will be no confusion, no misunderstanding. Now all I want to know is whether all the delegates here are in favor of this plan?"

Other voices were now raised with questions, and for a time the discussion was heated. Then Chester bethought himself of the possible list of names that General Haan had mentioned.

"Colonel," the lad said, "may I ask the strength of our organization? Have you the means of telling, roughly?"

"I can tell you almost exactly," was the reply.

Rogers reached in his inside coat pocket and produced a small book. Holding it in his left hand he tapped it with the forefinger of his right.

"In this book," he said, "are the names of every member of the organization up to a week ago. They have been furnished by trusted agents. Calculating on the basis of names here, I would say that the movement at this time is about two thousand strong. Is that what you would know, sir?" he asked of Chester.

"Yes, sir," was the lad's reply.

Still the discussion continued. Chester glanced at his watch.

Ten o'clock.

"Now," said Rogers, "we will vote on this proposition. I will call for your votes separately."

Starting at the man on the extreme left, he called for "yes" or "no."

Now and then there were interruptions as the vote proceeded and at twenty minutes past ten Chester had not been called upon to vote.

At ten-twenty-five there were still three men ahead of Chester.

Suddenly a desperate plan entered Chester's head. He resolved instantly to act upon it.

His watch was in sight as it came his turn to vote.

"Captain McGuillcudy?" boomed Rogers' voice.

Chester hesitated a moment. Then he said :

"I want to make dead sure I'm right, sir, because the men who have sent me here are entitled to that consideration. I do not want to act blindly. May I ask, sir, if you will favor me with a look at half a dozen names in that little book?"

Rogers jumped to his feet.

"Do you doubt my word, sir?" he demanded.

"No, sir, I do not," Chester hastened to reply. "But I would be glad to see there the name of one man of importance, beside your own. Surely, in view of the circumstances, I am not asking too much."

Rogers considered the matter a few moments. Then his hand went to his pocket again and he produced the book.

"I guess you are entitled to see such a name," he said at last. "Here, how will this do?"

Chester glanced at the book and gave a whistle of amazement. For the name he had seen written there was indeed one of prominence.

"Surprises you, does it?" chuckled Rogers. "Well, there are other important ones here, too."

The chief of the plotters had allowed the book to lie for a moment in Chester's hand. For a moment Rogers had released his hold on it. Chester still grasped it with his left hand. Again he glanced at his watch.

"Getting late," he said aloud. "Twenty-nine minutes after ten o'clock."

Suddenly he shoved the book containing the names of the conspirators into his left trousers pocket.

"Here!" cried Rogers. "What's the meaning of that? Give me that book!"

In answer, Chester's hand dropped to his pocket and a moment later a pair of automatics flashed. Without waiting for action from the others, Chester turned quickly and shot out the only light in the room—a small lamp near the far wall. At the same moment there came a heavy blow on the front door, followed by a crash on the rear portal.

The plotters jumped to their feet. Came shouts and curses. Chester smiled.

CHAPTER X

THE RAID

CONFUSION reigned in the rendezvous of the conspirators.

"Treachery!" cried a voice that Chester recognized as that of Rogers. "We are betrayed."

The sounds of heavy blows upon the doors in front and in the rear of the house rose above the din within.

Chester, the moment that the room was plunged

in darkness by the shattering of the lamp, crept silently to a far corner of the room and crouched down. He felt that he would be out of the line of fire in his present position should the soldiers without shoot at the conspirators; and he had little doubt that fighting was imminent. The lad knew that the plotters were desperate men. Cornered as they were, and with death staring them in the face should they be captured, they would fight to the last man.

Outside there was a crash.

"Door broken in," Chester told himself.

He was right. Footsteps sounded in the hall a moment later.

Inside the room where the conspirators were herded all had become silent. Each man had figured to himself that there was a bare possibility that his presence would pass unnoticed.

But this was not to be. Came a series of heavy blows on the door of the room.

At this some one struck a match.

The glow of the flame showed Chester the conspirators banked on either side of the door. At the same time the light exposed Chester to the plotters.

"There's the traitor!" cried a voice as the match sputtered out.

Several revolvers were turned in the lad's direction and there came several flashes of fire. But Chester had shifted his position the moment the match went out and thus escaped the bullets.

He crept cautiously across the room, taking care not to make the slightest sound. He was afraid to fire his own revolvers for fear of drawing attention to his new position.

A second match sputtered and showed Chester to the foes.

"There he is!" cried a voice.

Again revolvers spoke, and before Chester could change his position, he felt the whine of a bullet close to his right ear.

"Getting a little warm," he told himself. "Guess I'd better get in the game."

He levelled both revolvers in the direction of the huddled mass of plotters and sent half a dozen bullets in their direction.

Came cries of pain and fierce imprecations.

Meantime the door was giving under the fierce blows from without.

Rogers' voice rose above the din.

"Out the window!" he cried.

There was a rush for the window, men trampling and jostling each other in order to be the first there.

The glass pane went clattering to the street as the first man sent his fist crashing through it. But even as he would have leaped to the sill and jumped out, he drew back with an exclamation.

"We're surrounded!" he cried.

It was true. Outside the forms of half a hundred soldiers were distinguishable. Plainly, escape

was impossible in that direction. The conspirators drew back to the center of the room.

"Where's the traitor?" came Rogers' voice in the darkness. "We'll kill him before they get us!"

Again a match flared. As it did so Chester's revolver spoke and the match went out as the man who had struck it toppled to the floor. At the same moment Chester shifted his position again, even as a bullet struck where the flash of his weapon had showed him to be a minute before.

Several times this happened and in some manner Chester each time escaped the bullet that was meant to kill him.

But the lad knew that this game of hide-and-seek could have but one ending. Eventually one of the bullets aimed at him was sure to find its mark.

The lad conceived a plan.

The door was still holding firm under the blows of the American soldiers without. It was of stout oak and seemed capable of holding for some minutes longer. Chester knew that if he expected to get out of the room alive hasty action was imperative.

Slowly he crawled along the wall, crouching almost to the floor. Once or twice he stopped to fire at a form that lifted a lighted match and in each of these instances he stepped forward more quickly after firing.

At last he came to the door. With a sudden

movement he reached up, turned the key in the lock and threw the door open, dropping to the floor as he did so.

A moment later a score of American soldiers leaped into the room.

The conspirators stood with their backs against the far wall. Having the advantage of the light that streamed through the door and being themselves in the darkness, they poured a hail of bullets into the ranks of the soldiers. Half a dozen men dropped, but the others sprang forward regardless of the bullets that came at them like hail.

Chester wormed his way through the soldiers and reached the hall in safety. There he got to his feet and looked around for Hal. He did not see him.

"Guess he wasn't able to fix it up with the general," muttered Chester.

He debated with himself a moment and then joined the rush of soldiers as they pushed into the room to capture the conspirators.

Somebody had struck a match during the fighting and lighted several candles, which some of the men held above their heads. The light showed half a dozen of the plotters grovelling on the floor and some others lying perfectly still. The bodies of several loyal soldiers were mingled with the conspirators.

In a far corner of the room near the window Rogers and a dozen of his men stood at bay.

"Surrender!" cried an American lieutenant, who had led the dash into the room.

Rogers' answer was a shot from his revolver, which grazed the lieutenant's cheek, leaving a track of blood in its wake.

"Well, if you must have it," said the lieutenant, at the same time passing his left hand across his face. "Fire, men!"

Half a score of rifles crashed and when the smoke cleared away Rogers was standing alone.

"Throw up your hands, man!" cried the lieutenant. "You are hopelessly outnumbered."

Rogers' revolvers clattered to the floor and he raised his hands high in the air.

"You've got me!" he said quietly.

The soldiers grounded their rifles and the lieutenant approached his prisoner. As he did so, Rogers suddenly dashed forward, and upsetting the lieutenant, leaped toward the door.

There was only a single figure between the arch plotter and the open doorway.

This was Chester.

The lad sprang forward to intercept the flight of the prisoner. Rogers struck out with his right arm. The blow caught Chester glancingly on the cheek and the lad staggered back.

But before the prisoner could pass through the door Chester had recovered himself and sprang forward. He tackled the man as he had often been

wont to do in the days when he played football with his school team—around the legs.

So great was the momentum of Chester's spring that Rogers was carried off his balance and fell to the floor, with Chester on top of him. Rogers let out a roar like that of an angry bull, and in spite of Chester's hold dragged himself to his feet and the lad with him. One hand closed around Chester's throat as he lifted the boy clear of the floor.

"I've got you at any rate, you traitor!" Rogers cried.

Holding the lad at arm's length, Rogers drew back his ponderous fist.

But just as he was about to strike, a single revolver spoke sharply.

Rogers released his hold on Chester, slowly staggered back several paces and then crumpled up on the floor and lay still.

Hal dashed to Chester's side. It was he who had fired the shot that in all probability had saved Chester's life.

Chester glanced up as Hal came toward him.

"Well," he said, "I guess you are in at the finish, all right."

Hal knelt down and helped Chester to his feet.

"It seems I got here just in time," he declared. "Looks like the others here were too stupefied for the moment to do anything. They stood around

with their mouths open. Looked like they wanted to see how hard a blow the man could hit."

"You dropped him just in time," Chester replied. He touched his throat gingerly. "Great Scott! what a grip he had," he added.

In the meantime, the American lieutenant who had led the soldiers into the room had stooped over the body of Rogers and made a hasty examination.

Hal and Chester approached him.

"Dead?" asked Hal.

"No," was the reply. "He'll live to face a firing squad. The bullet went through his left side close to the heart, but the wound is only superficial. He'll come around in a minute."

The lieutenant proved a good prophet. Five minutes later Rogers, his wound hastily bound, was able to sit up and look around.

Slowly his eyes roved about the room. He saw half a dozen or more of his fellow conspirators sitting up, bound. Others lay still on the floor.

Rogers allowed a groan to escape his lips.

"So this is the end," he muttered. "Poor old Ireland." His eyes rested on Chester. "You are responsible for this," he almost shouted, pointing an accusing finger at the lad. "You are the man who has betrayed us. I'll get even with you for this."

"I guess not," was Chester's quiet reply. "You'll face a firing squad within the next twenty-four hours, or I miss my guess."

Rogers' face blanched.

"You can't have me shot!" he exclaimed. "I'm a British officer, you know."

"I guess that won't make much difference," said Chester. "I've the proof that you were conspiring against England and that you were giving, or planning to give, aid to the enemy. Your days are short, my dear colonel."

"I'll appeal to the king!" cried Rogers.

"Do," said Chester pleasantly. "I'll be pleased to hear the king's answer. But that's enough of this. Lieutenant," and he turned to the American officer, "I will leave you in charge of the prisoners. Come, Hal."

The two lads left the room arm in arm.

CHAPTER XI

AN HISTORICAL EPISODE

WHILE Hal and Chester are enjoying a much needed rest in their temporary quarters in the city of Rheims, it is necessary to leave them for a moment to relate an incident that probably did more than any one other thing to make possible the American advance in the Argonne forest about the middle of July—an advance that was to culminate in the great decisive battle of the war.

The scene was laid in the field headquarters of

Marshal Foch, commander-in-chief of all the Allied armies, near Soissons. Besides Marshal Foch there were present his staff and General Pershing, the American commander, and members of his personal staff.

On a long table, about which sat the dozen or more men, lay a score or more of maps. Upon these maps was detailed the strength and position of all the various divisions that comprised the American and French armies. The officers studied them in silence for some moments. Then General Pershing tapped one of the charts with his forefinger, and rising to his feet, said:

"There, sir, is where the decisive action of this war must be fought!"

"H-m-m," said Marshal Foch. "The Argonne, eh? Don't you know, general, that the enemy is massed there in greater strength than at any other point along the line?"

"The more reason for smashing him there, then," declared General Pershing.

"Your reasoning is good, general," Marshal Foch admitted. "I have not forgotten the glory that crowned American arms at Chateau Thierry, but at the same time I hesitate to send troops that as yet have to receive their baptism of fire into a sector like the Argonne forest."

"You will find that you will make no mistake by doing so, sir."

"That remains to be seen," declared Marshal Foch. "And yet if I do not follow your suggestion, I know that there will be great criticism. I am inclined to agree with you, however, general. I can see the advantage of a decisive victory in the Argonne, with a possible further advance toward St. Mihiel and beyond. It is worth trying."

"I request the honor for my troops, sir," said General Pershing quietly.

"And they shall have it," replied Marshal Foch, also quietly, getting to his feet. "It shall be your task, sir, to clear the Argonne forest of the enemy; and I realize that it will be no easy one."

General Pershing saluted the French commander-in-chief, and there was a glow of satisfaction in his eyes as he did so. Whether Marshal Foch knew it or not, there was no doubt in the heart of the American commander what the outcome of an American attack in the Argonne would be.

"Thank you, sir," said General Pershing.

For some time longer the two generals pored over the mass of maps and other data on the long table. The conference lasted well into the night, and when it broke up General Pershing immediately ordered his automobile and, despite the lateness of the hour, soon was speeding toward the distant city of Rheims.

It was after daylight when he reached his destination. Quickly he was driven to the quarters of

Major General Haan, to whom he outlined the nature of his conference with Marshal Foch.

Instantly all became hustle bustle in the American camp at Rheims. Staff officers rushed hither and thither. Others leaped into motor cars and sped toward the quarters of other divisional commanders—some far and some near. It became apparent that when General Pershing ordered the Americans to attack in the Argonne forest they would be in sufficient force to give a good account of themselves.

Among others, Hal and Chester found themselves summoned to the headquarters of General Haan. Half an hour later Hal was on his way to the quarters of Major General Peter E. Traub, of the Thirty-fifth division, whose troops were at that moment stationed near the historic battleground of Verdun. Chester, on his part, was the bearer of dispatches to Major-General Charles J. Bailey, of the Eighty-first division, whose troops were encamped on the south bank of the Meuse.

Thus, the American divisions that were to play the most important rôles in the battle of the Argonne forest, were the Thirty-fifth, composed for the most part of Missouri and Kansas men; the Eighty-first, Pennsylvania, Maryland and District of Columbia troops; the Thirty-second, Michigan and Wisconsin soldiers; the Seventy-seventh, recruited from New York City; and the Fortieth and Eighty-second depot divisions.

These troops were on the march almost as soon as their commanders received General Pershing's orders. From their positions they moved rapidly toward the distant Argonne forest, not a man in the ranks who was not eager and anxious for instant action.

But General Pershing was not foolhardy enough to order and advance without the most careful preparations. As the troops approached the forest from the south and west, they halted some miles before the woods while the heavy artillery was brought into position, vast stores moved up rapidly and detachments of engineers hurriedly summoned from other parts of the battle line. Thousands upon thousands of tons of ammunition were rushed to the front. Everything that human hands and skill could do to assure the success of the operations was done; and at last the time came when General Pershing felt he was ready to attack.

Tens of thousands of American boys were to take part in the great battle of the Argonne. And General Pershing had asked this honor for his men. It was the vital point of the Allied battleline in what was to be the final effort of the forces of democracy to shatter the legions of autocracy.

There is little of critical historical value that can be written of the battle of the Argonne to-day. The documents, the orders, are not yet available. But enough is known of the operations to give a brief

outline of the manner in which the Yankees attacked and of the success that crowned their efforts.

Sleep was a luxury with the troops who stood ready and eager for the battle. It was something to be seized whenever the opportunity offered, not in the almost pleasant trench dugouts to which the men had been accustomed, but in the open, rain or shine, whenever occasion offered. Rations hung upon the generosity of the rolling kitchens. The ground was covered with mud.

That the Germans had an eleventh-hour suspicion of the exact moment of the American attack was revealed by their tactics. They attempted to steal two feathers from the cap of wisdom with which the French had met the last enemy offensive of July 15. First they endeavored to copy the example of General Bundy's counter battery work which opened at Chateau Thierry an hour before the German guns spoke. Secondly they tried to imitate General Gouraud's withdrawal which saved the lines west of Rheims.

But they failed to drag into position sufficient weight of metal even to threaten the silencing of the great American guns, and their calculations went wrong when they tried to withdraw from their first to their second lines of defense.

Yankee air scouts, which hovered above the enemy lines, from time to time brought back reports of the enemy's movements. They reported that the enemy

was concentrated just beyond the expected range of the American fire. Thus not a shot was wasted on the desert the Germans had prepared. Up went the noses of the Yankee guns and down came the barrage upon the concentration.

Hal and Chester saw that barrage red against the sky. They found themselves in that section of the field east of Verdun.

Upon the first day of the battle, along toward afternoon, the boys found themselves in an automobile bound for the headquarters of General Traub of the Thirty-Fifth division. The town in which the general's quarters were located had become American almost over night.

Every corner of every damp stone cottage was quarters for an officer or billet for officers or men. The lads delivered dispatches and soon found themselves on another mission. They had a light car. They were headed for the front. They did not know just what the conditions were for getting through, but they were going just as far as they could on wheels and then walk.

Hal was at the wheel.

"I'm willing to try most anything," he said to Chester, "but this is rather a new ordeal, pursuing a receding front over roads of a redeemed No Man's Land."

For several kilometers the road was good, wide enough to pass the overtaken convoys. Prisoners

were coming along in lots of from a score to several hundred. They had already been issued mess kits and warm blankets. Most of them were smiling, even grinning broadly. They appeared to think the joke was on their fellows, who had not been lucky enough to get out of the fight.

Hal and Chester soon passed the "jumping off" spot, where American troops had followed the opening barrage.

"Guess we'd better switch off the main road here," said Hal.

They left the main highway to escape the jam and took a roundabout way until, when they came into the main stream again, they were under the brow of Montfaucon. The stream of traffic was really moving (tanks, convoys, batteries), as might be told by driving a stake in the ground and taking observations at intervals, but it certainly was slow freight.

The engineers were working with a ferocity of effort. With no time out for sleep, and short delay for food, they had been bending to the work for forty-eight hours. Laying a road across that devastated plain which could sustain traffic at all appeared to be a miracle. But it was their job to keep up with the doughboys ahead, and they were doing it to the best of their ability.

Hal and Chester were now within sound of rifle

and machine-gun fire. American batteries were blasting away on every side of them.

The road had to crawl as best it could around craters and mines. The next village, or rather the next heap of stones, was hardly a mile away on a straight line. There was only the semblance of a path. Thousands of Germans were buried on that plain after the campaign against Verdun in 1916, but there remained no marking of their graves. Shells had plowed the fields, burying the wooden crosses.

Hal and Chester now abandoned their automobile.

They struggled around shell holes, dragged their feet through a swamp, waded a stream, but found that the elusive path did follow a lane through the mire.

And all about them the roar of battle seemed to redouble in ferocity.

"Well, it's some fight," declared Chester.

"Right you are, Chester," Hal agreed, "and it seems to be getting hotter all the time and shows no sign of abatement. Guess it will last long enough for us to get our fill, all right."

"It will last till the Germans cry they've had enough," said Chester.

They plodded on.

CHAPTER XII

A REFUGE

It was growing dark now and it began to rain. Despite the rain, however, the absence of mist allowed quite remarkable visibility. Just ahead, Hal and Chester saw the dim outlines of a little village. They moved toward it.

This village, they found, was used as a congregating spot, probably because it was marked on the map and could be referred to in orders. The wounded, on their way back to the hospitals, halted in the village for a moment's rest. A barricade of barbed wire had been strung up just beyond to make a temporary cage for the few prisoners, who were walking around in a circle trying to keep warm. Unlike the men, who appeared reasonably happy now that their fighting days were over, the German officers appeared peculiarly glum.

Hal and Chester pushed on in an endeavor to locate the advance post command. Soon they found themselves in a group of hills. Information, they found, was not to be had for the asking. Everyone seemed too busy to pay much attention to them.

The fighting was on a never-letting-up order, advancing whenever possible, temporarily dropping back upon occasion, but always registering gains in

the total. The roar of battle grew louder. German battery work was livening up for the night.

A lieutenant ran toward the lads.

"Gas attack!" he cried.

Instantly the men near Hal and Chester became queer-snouted figures as they clapped on their gas masks; but they continued to advance.

Hal and Chester, as usual, carried their masks with them, and these they donned the moment the warning had been given.

Through the rain a moment later the lads saw, about a quarter of a mile away, a rather extended mass of yellow smoke rolling toward them.

"Here it comes," Hal muttered to himself.

But the lad was wrong.

Gradually the oncoming mass seemed to slow down, and while still at some distance from the nearest American troops, it seemed to halt; and then it rolled back toward the Germans.

The reason was clear enough. The wind had shifted almost as the gas would have reached the American lines and the poison vapor now was rushing back whence it had come. This meant that the weapon launched by the foe had become a boomerang. Hurried preparations were made within the German line to meet the gas.

Hal and Chester heard a loud cheer some distance to their right. They removed their gas masks and looked in that direction.

A fresh American division was leap-frogging through to replace the division which had won its spurs in a series of heroic assaults. In its leaping forward, it was also settling down for the night.

"Guess that's where we want to go," Hal told Chester, raising his voice to a shout to make himself heard above the din of battle.

"Let's go then," said Chester.

They set off in that direction.

The infantry of this fresh division, the lads knew, would remain in the rain during the night, to go forward the first thing in the morning. It was their desire to reach the divisional commander as soon as practicable that they might learn from him the exact nature of the American situation and report back to General Traub of the Thirty-fifth division who had been ordered to act instantly upon whatever information was thus obtained. Consequently, the lads knew that they had strenuous hours of work ahead of them.

As they moved along they found that the division that had been ordered to the front for the night was the Forty-second, commanded by Major-General Charles D. Rhodes. This division was composed of national guardsmen of the various states and was one of the "Rainbow" divisions that crossed to France soon after war was declared.

The area in which the lads found themselves was utterly impracticable for wheeled traffic. Both lads

knew that the *de luxe* hostelry for the night would be inside a wagon some distance from the front.

"Poor fellows," said Hal. "They'll have a tough night of it."

"So they will," Chester agreed.

There were a few tents scattered about that the troops had pitched immediately a halt was ordered. Also some of the men had shelter halves, but the vast majority were selecting the best-looking crater rims to serve as settees to line up around in groups.

Occasionally a German shell burst close but the men paid no attention to these. The enemy fire was spasmodic. There appeared little danger of an attack that night.

The drizzle changed into a torrent. By the time Hal and Chester reached the field headquarters of General Rhodes they were drenched to the skin.

"General's busy," said the staff officer whom Hal approached, "but he'll be at liberty in half an hour. You'll probably have to spend the night here, so if you'll take my advice you'll put in your spare time hunting a place to sleep."

"Thanks," said Hal. "We'll wait."

"Suit yourselves. I'm just giving you a little advice. If you'll go over there about a quarter of a mile," and the officer waved toward the rear, "you'll find an old Boche battery outfit with some pretty deep concrete dugouts. They are more or less filled with dead Germans and there's water in the bottom,

and plenty of cooties, but you'll be out of the rain if you go only half way down and sit on the steps."

"Thanks," said Hal again. "We'll remember that if we have to stay the night."

"I'll take your names to the general," said the staff officer. "It may be that he'll see you at once."

He was back in a few minutes and motioned the lads to follow him.

"Right in there," he said, indicating a tent which stood with the door-flap wide open. "You see, the general is rather a democratic sort of person. What's good enough for the men is good enough for him."

The lads thanked the officer and entered the general's tent. The general looked up as they entered.

"What can I do for you, sirs?" he asked, returning their salutes.

"We come from General Traub, sir," said Chester, acting as spokesman. He passed a document to General Rhodes, which the latter scanned quickly.

"Very well," said General Rhodes, "I shall comply with these instructions, but first I have other work to do. I shall have my answer ready at midnight. You will report to me then."

The lads saluted again and left the tent. Outside they again encountered the officer who had directed them to the general's tent.

"Well," he said, "will you stay or not?"

"Until midnight, at least," replied Chester. "In

the meantime we'll hunt up the refuge you spoke of."

"You can't miss it," was the reply. "Only trouble is you are likely to find it filled up when you get there. Everybody is seeking the best shelter he can find. It's a terrible night."

A terrible night it was indeed. The rain still fell in torrents and the air was very chilly for the time of year. The ground was ankle deep in mud, which made walking difficult. Taking the precaution to get the exact location of the refuge from the officer, the lads started off in the darkness.

"This," said Chester as they plodded on, "is one of the discomforts of soldiering. There's many a man who can bear up well enough under fire but who can hardly stand this weather."

"We can't have everything to suit us," was Hal's reply. "It's got to rain sometimes, you know, and we can't call off a battle on account of rain like we can a ball game."

"That's true, of course," agreed Chester, "but just the same they should furnish us with nice big umbrellas."

"By Jove!" said Hal. "We'd make a fine-looking army with a few thousand umbrellas, wouldn't we?"

"Perhaps not," Chester admitted, "but they'd help some. It's fortunate we've our heavy coats with us."

"Right," Hal agreed. "We'll probably have to

use 'em for pillows and covers both before the night's over."

Chester shivered.

"To tell you the truth," he said, "I'm about done up. Feel like I was going to have the grippe."

"I don't feel very well myself," Hal whispered. "A cup of something hot right now would do us a world of good."

"I could go a bite to eat, too," said Chester.

"Same here. Maybe we'll be able to rustle up something when we reach our destination. Some of the fellows should have something to spare. And if I'm not mistaken, here we are now."

A small, low, dugout loomed up in the darkness ahead. Inside faint lights twinkled and the lads heard the sound of voices. The boys were cheered immensely.

"Looks pretty good to me," declared Hal, quickening his steps.

"Hope they let us in," said Chester anxiously.

"Oh, they'll let us in, all right. If they don't, we'll go in anyhow."

They approached and Hal bore his weight against the door, which was flung open. The two lads stepped into the dim light within.

At once they were the center of all eyes, and Hal made out that in the room were perhaps a dozen or more officers, all huddled around a small fire in a small corner.

"Can we come in, gentlemen?" asked Hal, stopping just inside.

"Help yourselves," invited one of the others. "Room for a couple more, I guess. Bad night outside, eh?"

"Rather," replied Hal grimly. "Thanks for your hospitality. We'll move up to the fire, if you don't mind."

The other officers made room for them.

"We don't want to impose," said Hal, "but by any chance do one of you fellows have a cup of coffee, or anything hot, handy?"

There was a stir of uneasiness among the others. Each man seemed to radiate guilt.

"I'll tell you," said one at last, "we don't have anything hot, but we've something just as good."

From an inside pocket he produced a small bottle, which he passed to Hal.

"What is it?" asked the lad.

"Brandy. Help yourself."

"Thanks," said Hal, "but I'd rather not, captain."

"Oh, come now, don't be standoffish."

"No," said Hal, "I don't want any. That settles that."

"But it doesn't settle it," said the other, whom Hal could see had been drinking rather heavily. "I insist."

He tried to thrust the bottle into Hal's hand and

accidentally dropped it. There was a cry of dismay from others in the room. The officer whirled on Hal.

"You did that on purpose!" he cried.

CHAPTER XIII

A FIGHT

HAL'S face flushed, and he took a step forward.

"That," he said quietly, "is a lie!"

The other raised his right fist and struck at Hal, but Chester intercepted the blow.

"Here! None of that!" he said sharply.

He held the man's hand in a firm grip despite his struggles.

"Let me go!" cried the officer, in vain trying to wrench his arm free. "I'll show him!"

Expressions of anger came from others grouped around the room, and Chester realized that there was little likelihood of finding sympathy among them. It was perfectly plain that they were on the side of the man who had possessed the bottle and the lad realized that the anger was caused by the loss of the brandy.

"Look here, you fellows," said Hal, stepping forward again, "my hand never touched that bottle. He dropped it trying to force it into my hand. It's

true, I don't drink, but I had no mind to interfere with the rest of you."

"That doesn't bring back the brandy," grumbled an officer close to the fire.

"No it doesn't," agreed another. "And there isn't any more within fifty miles, so far as I know."

"I'm sorry," said Hal.

"That doesn't help anything," declared a third man. "I say that if Captain Cutlip wants satisfaction from this intruder he's entitled to it."

There were exclamations of assent and cries of "Good! Good!"

Chester released his hold on Captain Cutlip and stepped back. The latter had been somewhat subdued and now stood quietly enough.

"You're a fine bunch to be wearing Uncle Sam's uniform!" cried Chester, whirling on the others. "In the first place you should be ashamed of yourselves to gather around and gulp down a lot of liquor. I suppose you know the regulations in regard to drinking?"

"Well, I guess you're not going to squeal," declared an officer, stepping forward.

Chester waved him back.

"Don't worry," he said. "We don't happen to be built that way, though I've no doubt you'd be the first to squeal under similar circumstances."

"Look here," said an officer who had spoken before. "All this won't bring back the bottle. But

your friend here has called Captain Cutlip a liar. Cutlip can't permit that, you know, and he's entitled to satisfaction, if he wants it."

"And he can have it, if he wants it," declared Hal angrily.

"It seems to me," said Chester, "that this is a poor time and place for brawling. There'll be fighting enough for all of you to-morrow."

"But he called me a liar!" protested Cutlip.

"Well, if he hadn't," said Chester grimly, "I'd have done it myself!"

"What!"

"Oh, you heard me, right enough. That bravado doesn't go with me, I've seen your stripe before. You keep up this sort of thing and you'll draw your dishonorable discharge before the war's many days older."

Captain Cutlip's face flushed and he controlled his temper with difficulty.

"I'll attend to you after I've polished off your friend," he said.

"Then I've nothing to worry about," grinned Chester. "Now, men, if you are determined to go through with this thing, don't let me interfere."

Cutlip gazed around at the circle of faces.

"You'll second me, won't you, Gibson?" he asked of a man at random. "We may as well do this thing ship-shape. You fellows are entitled to a little

excitement, you know, and I'll promise you'll get it."

Chester smiled. He was perfectly aware of Hal's ability to take care of himself. The lad had demonstrated it on more than one occasion.

"Arrange it any way you wish," he said. "I'll second my friend here." He turned to the others. "You're Americans after all," he added, "and as such are bound to see fair play."

"Right," said a man named Pierson, also a captain. "I'll appoint myself master of ceremonies and will take on the first man who interferes."

"Then I'm sure things will be conducted according to Hoyle," declared Chester, eyeing the huge dimensions of Captain Pierson with an approving eye. "I'll leave the details to you, then."

"Good! The men will fight six three-minute rounds. If Cutlip here hasn't had his satisfaction in that time, he'll have to go without it. The same goes for your friend, Captain——"

"Paine," replied Chester, and also supplied his own name.

"Very well. Now the quicker we get this thing over the better. There's plenty of space in the center of the room here. You fellows," he turned to the other officers, "form a ring and keep your places. Now Gibson, you and Crawford get your men to their places."

This was quickly done. Hal divested himself of

his overcoat and coat and rolled up his sleeves. In his corner, Cutlip did the same. Then they walked to the center of the human ring.

"Fight when I call 'time' and stop when I call 'time,'" Pierson instructed them. "And if you're in a clinch, don't forget to break when I give the word. That's all. Hey, Thompson. You keep the time."

The man addressed exposed his wrist watch.

"Time!" called Pierson.

Hal and Cutlip advanced toward each other slowly, guards up. Cutlip was the slightly taller of the two and appeared more fully developed to the casual onlooker. He was a well-built man and, Hal saw at once, was no novice with his fists.

But Hal was far from a novice himself. What he lacked in height and reach, he was determined to make up in craftiness. He felt perfectly able to put an end to the fight with a single blow, could he land it.

Twice around the ring the men circled before a blow was struck. Then Cutlip feinted with his left and struck with his right. But Hal avoided the blow and there was a sharp "smack" as Hal's right fist found Cutlip's nose, drawing a stream of red.

Hal danced lightly back again.

"Ha! He got you there, Cutlip!" exclaimed a voice from the crowd.

Cutlip passed his arm across his nose and then

stepped forward more warily than before. This time it was Hal who did the leading. The lad feinted three or four times with dazzling rapidity and then launched a heavy right-hand blow that would have done considerable damage had it found its mark. But Cutlip had not been fooled and he escaped the blow by a quick leap aside. Before Hal could recover, Cutlip sent him staggering across the floor with a left and right to the head and chin.

Cutlip followed his advantage closely and Hal staggered into a clinch.

"Break!" came Pierson's voice.

The fighters stood apart.

The second's rest in the clinch had permitted Hal to recover himself and he was ready for Cutlip's next attack which came instantly. Hal's guard was perfect as he warded off a series of blows without attempting to counter and the round ended with both fighters fresh.

The second and third rounds were slow and Hal had a slight advantage in the fourth. He went into the fifth determined to end the battle then and there if possible. As before, in this round he maintained a perfect guard against the blows showered on him. But now Hal assumed the offensive himself.

He took a short-arm jab on his left cheek and countered on Cutlip's sore nose with a right and left that sent Cutlip staggering back. Hal followed his man closely and struck often and hard. Had

Cutlip not been an excellent boxer, Hal must have floored him at once.

But the man recovered himself and Hal found himself hard put to it to penetrate the other's guard. It was a great exhibition of sparring and the spectators expressed their delight with subdued cries.

Time was growing short, Hal knew, so he determined to rush the fighting. Nevertheless, he was not incautious and laid himself open to no chance blows. Again Hal fainted rapidly, and this time his right fist found a substantial mark on the point of Cutlip's chin. Down went the man. Hal stepped back and waited for him to rise, which he did at the count of ten, and despite Hal's efforts to keep him off, succeeded in staggering into a clinch.

"Break!" cried the referee, and at the same moment Thompson called "Time!"

"Tough luck, old man," said Chester to Hal during the minute's rest. "You had him that time. But you can do it now."

"Last round," called Pierson. "Time!"

They went at it again.

Hal decided to end the fight at once if it was humanly possible. He figured correctly that Cutlip, for the moment, would be extremely wary, so Hal dashed in, throwing caution to the winds.

One, two, three blows he landed before Cutlip could recover from his surprise at the suddenness of the attack. Then Cutlip countered heavily to Hal's

heart. The blow had lots of strength behind it, but still not enough, and it also gave Hal the opportunity for which he had been hoping.

Cutlip's guard for the moment was down. Timing his blow carefully, Hal swung from his knee and pivoted on his heel. He was launching a blow that would prove deciding should it land, but one that probably would cause his own undoing did it not find its mark.

But Hal had determined to take the chance.

Hal swung.

"Smack!" went his fist against Cutlip's chin, and there was a resounding crash as Cutlip crumpled upon the floor. Pierson bent over him, counting.

"—Eight! Nine! Ten! Out!" he chanted.

Hal hurried across the room and now helped the dazed Cutlip to sit up.

"What's the matter?" demanded that worthy slowly. "Did a shell hit me, or what?"

"No, just a fist," grinned Pierson, also stooping over the man. "And here's the boy that did it," and he seized Hal's hand.

Cutlip sat up and grinned sheepishly.

"Well, you licked me, all right," he said frankly. "I didn't think you could do it."

"I might not be able to do it again," smiled Hal.

"You won't have to," declared Cutlip. "I want to apologize to you, and to your friend." He looked around the room and got to his feet, and added:

"and I want the rest of you fellows to apologize, too."

"We do! We do!" cried one voice after another.

"Good!" exclaimed Cutlip. Then to Hal and Chester: "Here, get up to the fire and make yourselves at home. We're all friends together now. I've had my lesson."

Room was made for the lads at the fire. The conversation became general. Outside the rain still came down in torrents, but those inside paid no heed.

CHAPTER XIV

HELPING AMERICA GET THE NEWS

It was two days later. Hal and Chester had returned to their temporary quarters with General Traub's Thirty-fifth division. Their return trip had been made with less difficulty than the journey to the front.

Ahead, the battle for possession of the Argonne forest still raged at intervals. The Germans were offering a determined resistance to the American advance. In this section the fighting had been among the most furious of the war. Here the American troops suffered their greatest casualties, but the enemy was giving ground slowly and was to retreat with even greater haste before many days.

An orderly from General Traub found Hal and Chester in their quarters.

"Compliments of General Traub, sirs, and will you please report to him immediately?"

The lads grabbed their caps eagerly and followed the orderly to the general's quarters.

"Wonder what's up?" said Chester.

"You're always wondering something," was Hal's reply. "Wait and find out."

They were admitted to the general's presence at once. General Traub came to the point at once.

"I have here," he said, tapping a document that lay before him, "a notice from General Pershing to the effect that a certain war correspondent will reach my quarters to-day and that he is to be shown about our camp, put in touch with everything and later taken to the front. The war department seems to have reached the conclusion that the people back home are entitled to more first-hand views of operations over here than they have been able to glean from the dry official reports. Now, when this correspondent—I understand he is a photographer as well—arrives, I shall turn him over to you. An automobile shall be at your disposal. It is likely that the man will be here soon so you may make yourselves ready at once. For the moment, you will accept the correspondent's orders so long as they do not interfere with military discipline. Here's an

order for the machine. Take it to your quarters and await further orders."

The lads saluted and obeyed.

"Wonder who this war correspondent is?" asked Chester.

"Wondering again, eh?" returned Hal. "Well, it might be Stubbs."

"Stubbs is no photographer."

"How do you know he isn't?"

"Well, I never saw him take any photographs."

"That's no sign. However, I doubt if the man is Stubbs."

"I can't say I think much of this job," declared Chester.

"Perhaps not, but it will be better than doing nothing, like we have for the last day or two."

The second summons to the general's quarters came possibly three hours later. The lads climbed into the automobile and made their way there at once. Again they were instantly admitted, and the first figure their eyes fell upon as they entered was that of Stubbs.

"Mr. Stubbs!" exclaimed Chester.

"Mr. Stubbs!" repeated Hal.

Stubbs, who had been in animated conversation with General Traub, looked around quickly.

"Hal! Chester!" he exclaimed. Then to General Traub. "Are these officers to be my pilots, general?"

"Yes. You know them?"

"Rather," replied Stubbs dryly, "and I want to say, general, that I guess I had better postpone my visit to the front."

"Postpone it? And why?"

"Well, general, I have been in some rather peculiar places with these officers and if I let them pilot me, I'll probably get in a few more, and some of these days I'll fail to get out again."

Hal and Chester, meantime, stood silently with flushed faces. Under military discipline, they could not interrupt the conversation unless invited to do so.

"Is that so?" said General Traub, answering Stubbs. "I had no idea you were so well acquainted as all that. The trip should be much more pleasant as a result."

"Well, it won't, general, and the result probably will mean a funeral for me. I know these boys too well."

"Why, I suppose I can get you other guides if you insist, Mr. Stubbs," said General Traub. "I had no idea——"

"Of course you didn't, general," said Stubbs, "and so I shall accept them. I wouldn't deprive them of having a little fun with me for the world."

"You may be sure they will attempt nothing like that," declared the general. "Captain Paine! Captain Crawford! I wish you to understand that I

shall hold you personally responsible for the safety of Mr. Stubbs. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," mumbled Hal, his face red.

"Yes, sir," replied Chester, also flushing.

Stubbs grinned.

"I feel sure we shall get along famously, under those conditions, sir," he said to General Traub. "And now, with your permission, general, we shall be moving."

General Traub signified his assent and Stubbs motioned Hal to him.

"I wish you would carry my camera," he said.

Hal picked up the camera, which lay near by. Stubbs turned to Chester.

"I've some luggage here I'd be glad for you to give me a lift with, captain," he said.

He motioned toward a large portmanteau at his feet. Chester picked it up.

"I'll bid you adieu now, general," he said, and led the way from the room.

Neither Hal nor Chester said a word until they had stowed Stubbs' belongings in the tonneau of the large army automobile and had taken their seats in the car, Hal at the wheel and Chester in the tonneau with Stubbs.

"Now, Mr. Stubbs," said Chester, as the car lurched forward, "I've a good notion to pull your nose."

"Oh, no you haven't," declared Stubbs with a grin.

"Remember what the general said. This is one time where I've got you fellows where I want you."

Chester was silent a few moments; then said:

"Where do you wish to go, Mr. Stubbs?"

Again Stubbs grinned.

"That's the way I like to hear you talk," he said. "Usually I don't have much to say when you and Hal are around. Well, I want to get to the front as quickly as possible. Will you kindly pass the word to my chauffeur?"

Chester did so and there was silence in the car.

It was the night of the third day of the big American push in the Argonne forest that Hal, Chester and Stubbs moved toward the front. Owing to the congestion of the roads they were unable to make much headway, and it was several hours before they crossed a small pontoon bridge three miles from the headquarters of General Traub. As they progressed, thick mud almost stopped the progress of the car. Twice they got mired. Once it took the combined efforts of a dozen soldiers to rescue the car and the second time one wheel sank into a small but exceedingly muddy shell hole, so that it appeared to Stubbs that half the American army gathered to help them out.

All this was a warming experience, as they were now under a heavy fire and shells were falling on either side, and to front and rear. Then the car stuck again.

Soldiers approached and again tried to help. Two or three men tried time after time to lever the wheel out of the heavy mud with a piece of plank from a nearby bridge. It was very dark and Stubbs could scarcely see what they were doing.

The wheels churned up the mud and revolved rapidly, but refused to make headway. Every few moments the whine of an approaching shell was heard, but nobody paid any attention to the messenger of death save Stubbs, who ducked his head involuntarily from time to time.

Stubbs struck a match to see what was going on.

Instantly Chester smothered the flame with his hand.

"Here! What are you trying to do?" he demanded. "Want to get us all killed?"

"Great Scott! What have I done now?" Stubbs wanted to know.

"Well, you'd have marked our position for the enemy if I hadn't stopped you," said Chester angrily.

Stubbs sighed.

"I didn't know," he said. "But since when have you grown so cautious?"

"Never mind," replied Chester, "but don't try to light any more matches."

"By George! This would make a great picture," Stubbs grumbled. "But if you won't let me strike

a match I guess I won't have much of a chance with my flash and camera."

The mud was a foot deep and traffic was passing both ways with no one to direct it. Consequently, there was a succession of traffic congestion. Ambulance men were carrying wounded; dispatch riders were trying to force their motorcycles and single wheels through the muck; lorries loaded with supplies were overturned, and through the night plodded the mule trains carrying ammunition and the thousands of men passing to the front.

"Well," said Stubbs, "we're stuck. That's all there is about it. Guess we'll have to spend the rest of the night here in the mud."

But even as he spoke the car lurched forward.

"I'll tell you, Stubbs," said Chester, turning in his seat. "It's next to impossible to get through here in the darkness. We'd better turn around and go back. We'll make a fresh start in the morning."

"Anything suits me," declared Stubbs. "But let's get out of this mud."

But Hal found that, because of the congestion, he could not turn the car.

"Back her in, then," said Stubbs.

And this is what Hal was forced to do.

They back-tracked across the pontoon bridge just as day was breaking; and hardly were they safely across when there was a terrific explosion behind them.

"What's that?" demanded Stubbs.

"Bridge blown up, is my guess," declared Chester, "but I can't be sure in this darkness."

But Chester was right. The bridge had been blown into a thousand pieces by a German shell soon after the automobile had crossed.

"Well," said Stubbs, "I can see that you are trying to get me killed, all right. We'll wait till morning for the rest of this trip. Then I can see for myself where I'm going. I'll bunk with you fellows to-night."

"Suit yourself, Stubbs," said Chester.

An hour later the three turned in, as Stubbs put it, "for six hours, because I want to be well up to the front before it gets dark again."

CHAPTER XV

AT THE FRONT

So, at noon the following day, Hal, Chester and Anthony Stubbs started anew for the battlefront.

Travel was much easier by daylight, although it was with difficulty that the automobile was pushed through the deep mud in some places. The traffic was just as congested as it had been the night before, but now that the drivers could see there was less confusion.

The pontoon bridge destroyed by the enemy the

night before had been replaced by another structure early in the morning and the steady stream of traffic to the front continued as though there had been no interruption.

Stubbs was greatly impressed by the magnitude of the American forces in this region.

"You can talk all you want," he confided to Chester, "but when America goes into anything she goes into it right and with both fists."

"Right you are, Stubbs," was Chester's reply. "Considering the short time we have been in the war, the accomplishments have been greater than that of any of our Allies. At least that's my opinion."

"And mine. Given another year or more of preparation, and we could lick Germany single-handed."

"That's probably open to argument, Mr. Stubbs, but you've expressed my sentiments exactly."

Hal stopped the automobile several times in response to Stubbs' orders and the little man took half a dozen pictures of passing prisoners and other interesting sights.

"These," he said, "will show the folks back home just how things look here; and considering the number of sons, fathers, husbands and brothers they have in the war, they're entitled to know how they are faring."

"I guess you're right, Stubbs," said Chester, "although I had never thought of it that way before. At all events, whatever information you send back

can hardly be of any military value to the enemy."

Shrieking shells burst on all sides as the automobile went slowly along.

"At this rate, how long will it take us to get to the front?" asked Stubbs.

"Depends on what you mean by front, Mr. Stubbs."

"I mean front-line trenches."

"You won't get there at all, Mr. Stubbs. We don't have any trenches in this sector, except hastily thrown up earthworks. We're advancing, you know, we don't have time to stop and dig ourselves in as we did in the early days of the war."

"But surely there are second and third lines of defense of some sort. Suppose we are driven back?"

"We won't be driven back, Mr. Stubbs. That's the beauty of an American advance, you know."

"That sounds good, of course," Stubbs admitted, "but at the same time I know General Pershing is not the man to overlook all necessary precautions; nor will he permit it by his subordinates."

"We have such positions, of course, Mr. Stubbs," Chester said, "but they have not been constructed with the same idea of permanency as in the early days. We don't intend to camp out here for the winter."

"You don't, eh?"

"No."

"Suppose you think you'll be in Berlin by the first of the year, eh?"

"We'll be a whole lot closer than we are right now," declared Chester. "The tide has turned in our favor, you know."

"Well," said Stubbs, "I hope you're right, Chester. The sooner this war comes to an end the better for all concerned."

"It wouldn't surprise me if the end came at almost any time now," Chester declared. "I believe the Kaiser has had enough. He knows he's licked and the question is, how long before he will admit it?"

Stubbs smiled.

"Maybe it hasn't struck him just that way," he commented.

"Mark my words," said Chester. "The war will have ended before Christmas."

"Again all I can say is that I hope so," declared Stubbs, "but where are we now, Chester?"

"I can't tell you exactly, but from the sound of cannonading and the fact that the machine-gun fire is so plain, I judge that we are not more than a mile from the front."

"And how much closer can we safely go?"

"Well, it's not exactly safe here," said Chester dryly. "Hear those shells whining, Mr. Stubbs?"

"You bet I hear 'em, but nobody seems to pay any attention to them but me."

"That's probably because we are used to them, Mr. Stubbs."

"Trouble is," said Stubbs, "that I'll never get used to them."

Hal now brought the automobile to a stop and looked back.

"Here's where we get out," he said.

"What's the idea?" Stubbs wanted to know. "Looks to me like a perfectly good road ahead there."

"There's nothing the matter with the road, Mr. Stubbs," Hal replied, "but we're getting too close to the front to go farther by machine. We'll walk the rest of the way."

"You know best," agreed Stubbs, "but can I take my camera along?"

"I'd advise against it," replied Hal. "It is hardly likely you will be able to get a picture of the enemy's lines."

"You're the doctor," said Stubbs.

The three left the car and set out along the road, leaving the car close to one side of the thoroughfare.

"We'll need it when we come back," Hal said.

On either side of the road were dense clumps of trees. So thick was the foliage that the sun scarcely could be seen at any point along the road, although it was shining brightly overhead.

The roar of battle grew louder. The sound of

rifle fire was now clearly discernible above the crash of machine-gun fire and the heavy cannonading by both American and German batteries.

"Must be pretty hot up in front, Hal," said Chester.

"Right. I guess Stubbs will see all the excitement he wants this trip."

Rounding a bend in the road, the three came suddenly upon a group of American soldiers, commanded by a lieutenant, coming slowly toward them. From time to time, these men turned and fired in the direction from which they had come. Hal counted twenty men in the party.

He stepped quickly forward and accosted the lieutenant.

"What's the matter, lieutenant?" he demanded sharply.

"We're being pursued in force, sir," replied the lieutenant.

"What's that?" exclaimed Hal. "Are we beyond our own lines?"

"At this point, yes, sir."

"But I heard firing ahead."

"My men, sir."

"And where are the rest of your men?"

"Back there, sir," replied the lieutenant, pointing toward the distant German lines. "Dead, sir."

"Hm-m-m," said Hal. "Here's a situation that

calls for quick action. Why were you in advance of the main columns, lieutenant?"

"Reconnaissance, sir. Colonel England had information that the enemy was preparing to raid us in force. We verified it, sir."

At that moment a regiment of German infantry hove into sight some distance down the road.

"There they are, sir," said the lieutenant.

"I see 'em," declared Hal grimly. "Lieutenant!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Dispatch one of your men to Colonel England with what information you have gained. Also ask him for assistance. We must delay these fellows, if we can."

"Very well, sir. Benton!"

A soldier stepped forward and saluted.

"Sir?"

"Report to Colonel England at once. Tell him we're hard pressed here and in need of assistance. Tell him, too, that the enemy is raiding in force. We are endeavoring to hold him. Hurry!"

"Yes, sir."

Without the formality of a salute this time—a salute takes time—Benton turned and darted back down the road at top speed.

"With your permission, lieutenant," said Hal, "I will assume command here."

"Very well, sir."

"Chester!" called Hal.

"All right, old man."

"Take ten men and hide in the woods to the right. Make a detour and come back to the road again a quarter of a mile farther in German ground. We've been spotted, so you'll have to hurry and make rather a wide detour. Lieutenant, you will come with me and the rest of the men. Stubbs, you, too. We'll enter the woods to the left here and try and keep pace with you, Chester."

"All right, Hal."

"Get moving, then. We've no time to lose. Come, men."

The little detachment split suddenly into two parts and sought the shelter of the woods on either side of the road. Stubbs ran along close to Hal, grumbling, but unafraid.

A German volley burst forth even as the men disappeared beneath the sheltering foliage of the trees.

"Straight into the woods, lieutenant," Hal called. "The enemy may anticipate my move, but I doubt it. Nevertheless, they'll probably spread out, hoping to come upon us eventually. Run!"

He suited the action to the word and the others dashed forward behind him. For perhaps five minutes Hal went at his best pace and then slowed down and looked at his men.

"All here, I see!" he said briefly. "Good! Now we'll march due east. We should be able to get in behind the raiders, or else catch them napping a

quarter of a mile ahead. If the others have met with our luck, our little venture will be a success."

He led the way through the woods, but more slowly now.

"Stubbs," he said, "I'm sorry to get you into this mess, but it can't be helped. However, you're safer with us than you would be wandering about by yourself."

"I've been with you before and come out all right," replied Stubbs simply. "I'm betting on you to pull us through again, Hal."

"Thanks," said Hal quietly. "I've always known you had the proper spirit, Mr. Stubbs. Sometimes it takes an occasion like this to bring it out of a man."

Fifteen minutes later Hal wheeled his men sharply back toward the road, and they proceeded cautiously. Then, suddenly, Hal threw up a hand. It was a signal to halt.

"Quiet!" the lad whispered.

CHAPTER XVI

A SKIRMISH

CHESTER and his followers had proceeded with the same caution that had characterized the advance of Hal and his men. The woods in which this party

found themselves was even more dense than on the opposite side of the road.

Chester, according to his calculations, had now reached the spot where Hal had instructed him to halt, and accordingly the lad gave the order in a low voice. Then, wheeling back toward the road a few moments later, he advanced more cautiously than before; and directly he came within sight of the road.

For a moment Chester was undecided. There were no Germans in sight when the lad poked his head from among the trees to reconnoiter and for a moment he was minded to lead his men into the open. But he soon changed his mind. In the first place he knew Hal well enough to realize that the latter had in mind some plan that promised at least a fair degree of success. So he decided to keep to his shelter. In the second place, as he was debating just what to do, a body of Germans appeared down the road.

Chester drew back among the trees.

While Chester had no means of telling, as yet, he felt sure that Hal and his men had reached their rendezvous across the road. He felt absolutely certain that Hal would make his presence known at the proper moment. He decided to await developments.

For his part, Hal, when he gave the signal to his men to halt, had just sighted the approaching Ger-

mans. He could not tell from the present distance in just what strength they were advancing. He felt perfectly secure in his present position, however, and he decided to learn something of the numbers of the enemy before determining his course of action. Accordingly, he waited quietly.

The Germans approached somewhat slowly, utterly unaware of the danger that lay ahead of them on either side of the road. They advanced with the confidence of men who had a clear path ahead. That a handful of Americans had managed to get in behind their friends who had so recently traversed the same road apparently had not entered the heads of their officers.

Carefully concealing himself as he peered from among the trees, Hal soon ascertained that there were not more than three score of the enemy in the present force.

"Three to one," the lad muttered, "but we'll have the advantage of a surprise attack."

In that moment he made up his mind what to do, and in his calculations he took into consideration that Chester, on the opposite side of the road, would know how to act when the occasion presented itself.

Hal stepped back into the woods and posted his men perhaps ten yards apart along the path the Germans trod. The men stood ready.

Again Hal peered from his hiding place. The Germans were squarely opposite him now.

"Fire!" cried Hal.

There was a flash among the trees, followed by the crack of rifle shots.

Half a dozen Germans fell at the first volley. There was confusion among the others.

Up and down the line ran several German officers, trying to bring confusion out of the chaos. One waved his sword aloft and pointed toward the woods from where the first volley had come.

"Charge the woods!" he cried.

The next moment he pitched headlong in the road, struck by an American rifle bullet.

But he had managed to tell his men what to do to prevent annihilation at the hands of the few American troops among the trees. With a shout the Germans charged.

"Back, men!" cried Hal.

The Americans darted farther back in the woods, firing their rifles as they retreated.

"Now," said Hal to himself, "is the time for Chester to get busy."

On the far side of the road, Chester had reached the same conclusion. At the first sound of firing, he had posted his men in what he believed to be the most advantageous position. He had guessed Hal's plan of action correctly, so when the time for action came Chester and his men were ready.

Quickly his men advanced to the edge of the road, and poured in a volley upon the enemy even as the latter charged Hal and his men across the road.

This second surprise attack had just the effect Hal had known it would. Again the German soldiers were thrown into confusion as men dropped to the ground to the right and to the left.

Chester's force poured in a second volley, and then a third.

In vain the remaining German officers, a lieutenant and two sergeants, exhorted their men to stand firm in the face of the unseen enemy. It was no use.

The Germans broke and ran back down the road they had so recently traversed.

"After them, men!" cried Chester, and dashed into the open.

In the center of the road, the few Americans dropped to their knees, and quickly bringing their rifles to bear upon the fleeing enemy, opened fire.

To have continued along the straight road with the Americans shooting them down from behind would have meant utter annihilation for the Germans and there was not a man in the fleeing mass who did not realize it. So, without a word of command from their remaining officers, they deserted the open thoroughfare and plunged in among the trees for safety.

They had hardly disappeared from sight when

Hal led his force from the far side of the road and joined Chester in the open.

"Any casualties, Chester?" were the lad's first words.

"None," returned Chester. "And you?"

"Not a man touched."

"Quite a little victory, if you ask me," declared Chester.

"Rather," agreed Hal dryly. "But we can't stand here. Those fellows in the woods will be taking a few pot shots at us the first thing you know and we'll be right where we had them a few minutes ago."

"Back to the woods for us, then," said Chester, smiling.

"Right; but that's a pretty poor pun if you ask me."

"It wasn't meant for a pun," declared Chester. "I was merely offering a suggestion."

"And we'll act on it right now," said Hal. "Forward, men!"

The little force of Americans again sought the shelter of the big trees.

"Which way now, Hal?" asked Chester.

"That's the problem," was Hal's reply. "Of course, we can continue the way the lieutenant and his men were going when we encountered them, but that means that we will have to dodge the German raiders that have gone on ahead. On the other

hand, if we remain here we are likely to be trapped by a larger force of the enemy. It's rather a serious problem any way you look at it."

"May I make a suggestion, sir?" put in the lieutenant at this juncture.

"Of course," said Hal. "By the way, lieutenant, what is your name?"

"Bennings, sir."

"Very well, Lieutenant Bennings, what is your suggestion?"

"I judge by the roar of battle to the northeast, sir," said Bennings, "that the American lines have been pushed further forward there. I have noticed that the roar of big guns has doubled in intensity during the course of the afternoon. I would suggest, sir, that we head through the woods in that direction. It may be that we will encounter some of the enemy, but we will eventually come to the American lines. Besides, it avoids the inaction of staying here, sir."

"Not a bad plan, lieutenant," was Hal's reply. "But moving in that direction will necessitate extreme caution for we are likely to come upon a strong force of the enemy unaware."

"Very true, sir; but the trees have afforded us capable shelter up to now. They will continue to do so, sir."

"I believe you are right, lieutenant," said Hal.

"Chester, what do you think of the lieutenant's plan?"

"Sounds all right to me," was Chester's reply. "There is one thing to recommend it that you don't seem to have thought of."

"What's that?" asked Hal.

"Well, it seems to me there is more opportunity for excitement in the lieutenant's plan," declared Chester.

Came a grunt of contempt from Anthony Stubbs.

"I thought you would be letting the truth out pretty soon," declared the war correspondent. "Always looking for the spot where the excitement is greatest, eh? Well, all right, but I'm looking for a place where it's quiet."

Hal eyed Stubbs in no little surprise.

"What's the idea, Mr. Stubbs?" he asked. "A short while ago you talked like a true soldier."

"It's all right to take chances when absolutely necessary," declared Stubbs with some heat, "but this idea of going around hunting trouble is all pure nonsense. When there's an easy way out, I say take it."

"But there doesn't seem to be any easy way out, Mr. Stubbs."

"Maybe not," Stubbs declared, "but certainly there is an easier way out than that proposed by Lieutenant Bennings."

"Well, Mr. Stubbs," said Chester, "I've another plan that may suit you."

"I'll tell you whether it does when I hear it," declared Stubbs. "Let's have it."

"Why," said Chester, "we'll give you a couple of rifles, and then you can go your way and we'll go ours. How's that?"

"Not for me!" declared Stubbs angrily. "I'll stick to the finish. D'you think I want to go wandering about these woods by myself? Not much!"

"Then you are ready to fall in with our plans?" asked Hal.

"Well, I'm not exactly ready," declared Stubbs, "but I guess I can toddle along if I have to. By the way, did anyone of you grab one of those German rifles? I may need one."

"Here's one, sir," said a soldier, stepping forward and thrusting a weapon into Stubbs' hands.

Stubbs took it and turned it over gingerly.

"I probably won't know what to do with it when the time comes," he told the soldier, "but in the meantime it will make a good walking stick."

He took the rifle by the barrel and placed the stock on the ground.

"Well," he demanded a moment later, "are we going to stay here all night and wait for the Germans to come and get us? Let's move."

"Suits me, Mr. Stubbs," declared Hal. He looked

his men over carefully before giving the command:
"Forward! March!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE SNIPERS

AROUND and all about them, as the little body of Americans marched through the woods, rose the din of what was destined to prove the most decisive battle of the war. From time to time they heard the whine of heavy German shells as they flew overhead; came the rattle of machine-gun fire and the crash of rifles.

For perhaps an hour the little party moved forward, and then there was an interruption.

Hal, leading the way, came to an abrupt pause and threw up a hand for silence. Instantly the others halted and grew still. Chester moved to Hal's side.

"What's the matter?" he whispered.

For answer Hal pointed to a little clearing just ahead.

"Looks like a small German encampment," Hal replied.

It was true.

Still in the shelter of the trees and screened from sight by the thick foilage, the lads took in the sight ahead of them.

Fully two score Germans lay sprawled on the ground around three small wooden shacks that were the only structures in sight to break the monotony of the trees that surrounded them on all sides.

"What on earth are they doing here?" whispered Chester.

Hal shrugged his shoulders.

"I've seen queerer things than that in this war," he replied in a low voice, "but at a guess I should say that we have come upon a body of snipers posted here to pick off our men whenever they come within view."

"But surely they would not be so foolish as to remain there in the face of an American advance," Chester protested.

"Probably not," Hal agreed. "Chances are there are more of them posted in the trees about here. I judge these fellows to be only a small part of the band."

"By Jove!" said Chester. "They should be able to do fearful damage if they were not discovered."

"Right," Hal agreed. "It is fortunate we have come upon them without being discovered ourselves. It shall be our job to exterminate them."

"Pretty good-sized job, too, if the force is half the size you seem to think it is," Chester declared.

Again Hal shrugged his shoulders.

"The bigger the job the more necessary its suc-

cessful completion," the lad said. "But we'd better move back a bit before we are discovered."

Silently Hal led his men back farther into the woods, and when he had found what he believed was a safe place he called a consultation. In a few words, the lad outlined the situation.

"But, Hal," Stubbs protested, "surely we can make a detour and get around these fellows."

"But we don't want to get around them, Mr. Stubbs," declared Hal.

"Don't we?" demanded Stubbs. "Why don't we, eh?"

"Because it would leave them free to continue their sniping," Chester put in. "They will be able to pick off many an American soldier unless we succeed in putting the whole force out of business."

"Chester," said Stubbs quietly, "did it ever strike you that some of these days you two fellows are going to bite off a bigger piece than you can chew?"

"Perhaps," said Chester with a shrug, "but nevertheless, here's a job ahead of us and we've got to attend to it. If you wish, Mr. Stubbs, you are perfectly at liberty to leave us here and proceed alone."

"Never mind," replied Stubbs hastily. "I'll stick."

"Very good, then," said Hal. "Now to lay our plans. Of course, it is out of the question for us to attack openly. In the first place, we are greatly outnumbered, and again we probably would be spot-

ted by snipers in the trees before we could make a break across the open. Then, too, there are probably more of the enemy in those shacks, who could remain inside and pick us off almost at will."

"What do you suggest then, sir?" asked Lieutenant Bennings.

For a moment Hal was lost in thought. Then he glanced at his watch, and finally replied.

"It now lacks a little more than an hour of dusk. After nightfall, there is little likelihood that the snipers will remain on the job in the trees; they could do little good without daylight. Chances are, of course, that guards will be posted without through the night, but I figure that most of the enemy will seek the shelter of the shacks for their sleep."

"You mean to steal upon them in the dark, then?" questioned Chester.

"That seems to me to be the best plan," Hal admitted. "Do you find any fault with it, Chester?"

"Well, no," was Chester's reply. "I guess you've hit upon the best hour of attack, but I believe I can suggest a detail that may help."

"Let's have it."

"If we approach silently enough to secure the guards without discovery," Chester said, "why not set fire to the three buildings?"

"By Jove!" exclaimed Hal.

"There is plenty of dry brush and timber here," Chester continued. "Now, if we can succeed in set-

ting fire to the buildings, we can draw off at a distance and throw a barrage of rifle bullets around them. It will be as much as a German's life is worth to step forth."

"And if he doesn't step forth he'll burn, eh?" said Hal.

"Exactly," replied Chester.

"What do you think of the plan, lieutenant?" Hal asked of Bennings.

"A first rate one, sir," was the lieutenant's reply. "I will cast my vote in favor of it, sir."

"Good!" said Hal. "So shall I."

"Well, I don't know whether I shall or not," declared Stubbs.

"Stubbs," said Chester, "you may be an American citizen and all that, but here is one place besides the District of Columbia where a citizen has no vote. You just sit tight, we'll do the voting."

"But——" Stubbs began.

"No buts, Mr. Stubbs," said Hal. "Chester is right. You have no voice in military matters."

"But," said Stubbs again, "don't forget that you boys are to be held personally responsible for my safety to General Traub."

"Don't let that worry you, Mr. Stubbs," said Chester. "We're the fellows who will have to answer if any harm befalls you."

"I know," returned Stubbs, "but I want to be there to hear all about it. What good will it do me

if the general orders a firing squad for you both if I'm sleeping under the ground out here some place? Guess I'd better be responsible for my own safety, to some extent."

Hal smiled in spite of himself.

"Stubbs," he said, "you're a queer egg."

"What's that?" demanded Stubbs. "Egg, am I? Let me tell you something. Maybe, before the night's over, you'll find I'm not half as bad as you seem to think I am."

"That's all right, Stubbs," said Hal. "No offense meant."

"And none taken," replied Stubbs with a grin, "but I just want to remark that you've a deuced queer way of expressing yourself."

"Enough of that," said Chester. "Let's get busy and lay our plans. You can have all the fun with Stubbs you want to after the battle, Hal."

Stubbs opened his mouth with a retort to this remark, appeared to think better of it and said nothing.

"Very well," said Hal. "Now, lieutenant, will you take half a dozen men and search the nearby ground for brush and timber? We've got to have something with which to start the conflagration, and we probably won't have time to gather it in the vicinity of the enemy's rendezvous."

Lieutenant Bennings saluted, picked half a dozen men and disappeared among the trees.

"Fortunately," said Hal to Chester, "we have Lieutenant Bennings with us. He seems to be a capable officer. In addition, counting Mr. Stubbs here, we have twenty-one men."

"That's right," Stubbs interpolated, "count me in."

"Is that sarcasm, Mr. Stubbs?" demanded Chester.

"Not a bit, Chester! Not a bit!" declared Stubbs with some heat. "I mean what I say. Surely I've a right to get in on this, though I'm not in uniform. But I'll enlist in the ranks for this one venture."

"Very well, Mr. Stubbs," said Hal quietly. "Your services shall be accepted and I have no doubt you will give a good account of yourself."

"Nor I, Mr. Stubbs," declared Chester.

"I shall command the party that will set fire to the middle shack," Hal continued. "You, Chester, shall take charge of the building on my right, and Lieutenant Bennings shall direct operations on my left. Is that satisfactory?"

"Of course," said Chester. "But surely you do not intend to have our whole force advance to fire the buildings? Who will cover our operations?"

"Right," said Hal. "No; I figure on leaving four men of each party behind, so that each of us will take three men along."

"I see," said Chester.

"First, however," said Hal, "even before we make

an attempt to fire the buildings, we must secure whatever guards are posted there."

"Exactly," Chester agreed.

"For that job," said Hal, "I have elected myself and Lieutenant Bennings. We shall take half a dozen men; they should be enough. You will cover us from the woods."

"I understand," said Chester.

"After the guards have been put out of the way," Hal continued, "we'll come back for the dry brush and timbers. The moment these have been set fire to, we'll draw back again, after which we shall surround the buildings, keeping back out of the glow of the fire."

"Thus we won't be exposed to the enemy's fire should they succeed in getting out of the burning buildings," said Chester.

"Exactly," said Hal. "And we will be able to pick them off at will as they come out. Of course, we'll give each man a chance to surrender first."

"Of course," Chester agreed. "It would go against the grain to shoot them down in cold blood."

"That's about all," Hal said then. "Ah, here comes Bennings and his men with enough brush and timber for half a dozen such jobs."

"By the way, Hal," said Chester, "isn't there some danger of setting the whole forest ablaze?"

"No," was the lad's reply. "I have considered that. The burning shacks will make only a small

blaze. Besides they are in the center of rather a large clearing. Sparks will hardly carry that far."

"Well, all right," said Chester. "You know best."

Hal's plan was now outlined to Lieutenant Benning and the men. All agreed that it should succeed. Then they sat down among the trees to await the coming of night and the hour to strike.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE ATTACK

NIGHT fell.

An hour later the little party of Americans crept toward the edge of the woods. In vain Hal tried to pierce the darkness beyond with his eyes.

The night was black as ink.

"Lucky for us, too," Hal said to Chester in a low voice.

The latter made no reply.

Five minutes later, Hal, Lieutenant Benning and half a dozen men, flat on their stomachs, were crawling across the open ground toward the German shacks. Their rifles they had left behind, for the weapons would only impede their progress, but each man held a revolver in one hand as he squirmed slowly forward.

When Hal felt that they had gone a hundred yards, he touched the man closest to him. It was the signal for a halt. The man touched his nearest fellow, who passed the word silently until all were perfectly still.

Straining his ears, Hal thought he caught the sound of a voice ahead. But it was so dark that nothing was visible to the eye. A moment later, at a second signal, the Americans crawled slowly forward again.

Several times Hal repeated this maneuver and still was unable to distinguish anything ahead. He caught the sound of voices several times, however, and consequently knew that there was more than one foe on guard.

After what seemed an hour or more of crawling to the men, Hal suddenly made out two figures within arm's reach of him. So black was the night that the Americans had come upon their unsuspecting foes without being seen. They made but small specks on the ground and their progress had been as silent as the wind.

Hal and Lieutenant Bennings got slowly to their feet. The Germans stood for the moment with their backs to the Americans. Almost simultaneously Hal and the lieutenant clubbed their revolvers and brought them down heavily on a pair of German skulls.

The men dropped without a sound.

"Around the shacks!" whispered Hal. "There may be more of them there. Quick, men!"

With three men Hal hurried around the left of the shacks, while Lieutenant Bennings and three soldiers went in the opposite direction.

A short distance ahead, Hal saw a single form. He dropped quickly to the ground. His men followed suit. Then they squirmed forward.

Fortune was with them again. Hal drew close to the man without being discovered. Again the lad got to his feet silently, clubbed his revolver and struck. Down went the German.

The man was quickly bound and gagged, as had been the others, and the Americans moved forward again. Ten minutes later they saw four other forms squirming toward them. These, Hal knew, were Lieutenant Bennings and his party.

"Any more?" whispered Hal as they came together.

"No," Bennings whispered back. "Did you?"

"One," was Hal's low response. "Guess we've cleaned 'em out. Now to get back."

Silently the eight figures crept in the direction from which they had come. They made quicker time on the return trip. Once out of sight of the German shacks, they got to their feet and hurried forward. They were soon with the others again.

Hal related the success of the expedition in a few words and then said:

"Come, men! Get busy! We've no time to lose!"

Quickly the men selected for the task armed themselves with the dry brush and timber collected during the afternoon and hurried forward. This time the men went more boldly toward the German shacks, for there was now little fear of discovery. At the same time, they displayed considerable caution, for there was always the possibility that one or more of the enemy might issue from one of the shacks and spot them.

As arranged earlier, Hal led his men toward the center shack. Chester advanced to its neighbor on the right and Lieutenant Bennings and his men approached the building on Hal's left.

The three parties reached their objectives almost simultaneously. Due to the darkness, however, neither party could see the other.

Quickly the men set about the work of laying the brush and timber where it would do the most good, piling it close to the side of the frame shacks. Then Chester and Lieutenant Bennings awaited the signal from Hal before applying matches.

Directly the signal came. It was the striking of a match by Hal himself. Hal's match sputtered, and then the brush caught. Chester also lighted his torch without difficulty, but Lieutenant Bennings was forced to use two matches before the flame caught.

There was no need for further concealment. The

Americans dashed back toward their fellows in the woods.

Hastily Hal issued his orders now.

"Chester!" he cried. "Around to the right, quick! They'll be coming forth in a minute, and we must have them surrounded."

Chester and his men dashed away in the darkness.

"Around to the left, Bennings!" Hal ordered the lieutenant. "I will take care of the front here."

Away dashed Lieutenant Bennings and his men.

"Forward!" cried Hal to the soldiers who composed his own party.

The men advanced swiftly.

Out of range of light cast by the burning buildings Hal halted his men, and they stood with rifles ready, waiting for the first German to appear. Chester and Lieutenant Bennings in the meantime had circled the shacks and the Germans were now surrounded.

The burning brush and timbers piled up against the shacks were crackling merrily, but so far the Germans within seemed to be unaware of their danger.

"By Jove! They must be good sleepers," mumbled Stubbs, who was a member of Hal's party.

"I should say so," replied Hal. "I should think the heat would wake them up even if they don't hear the fire."

"They'll be out presently," declared Stubbs with a grin.

And he was right.

There came a cry of alarm from the German shack nearest Hal.

"Fire!" said a voice in German.

Came the sound of scrambling feet and a head showed in the door of the central building.

"Crack!"

An American rifle spoke, and the German head was withdrawn.

Heads appeared in the doors of the other shacks simultaneously.

"Crack! Crack!"

Again American rifles spoke and the heads disappeared.

For a space no more heads appeared.

Hal heard a rifle crack from the rear of the building.

"Chester's at work!" he said to himself. "Good! One of 'em must have tried to get out the window. By Jove! It must be getting hot. They can't endure it inside much longer."

Hal was right.

Three German figures burst from the central shack. They carried rifles in their hands.

"Here's where we get busy," muttered Hal. He raised his voice in a shout: "Surrender!" he cried in German. "You are surrounded!"

For answer one of the Germans threw his rifle to his shoulder and fired toward Hal's voice. The lad felt something sing past his left ear. He wasted no further time in words.

"Fire, men!" he cried.

The three Germans tumbled over in their tracks at the first volley from Hal's men.

Hal caught the sound of a shout from Chester: "Surrender!"

Hal smiled grimly to himself.

"Not yet they won't," he muttered. "They haven't discovered just what is going on."

A volley of rifle shots from the rear told him that he was right. The men apparently jumping from the windows in the rear and sides of the burning shacks had put up a fight and the volley was Chester's answer.

From Lieutenant Benning's position now came a volley, which told Hal that the same condition existed there.

"But if they must have it they must," Hal told himself.

From the doors and windows of all the shacks Germans rushed forth and slung rifles to their shoulders and fired into the darkness. Themselves excellent targets for the Americans, they could not see the Yankee soldiers.

The Germans became demoralized.

"Surrender!" cried Hal again.

A dozen men leaped from the nearest shack and hurled down their rifles as they came forth.

"Line up there, hands in air, and stand still!" Hal shouted.

The Germans obeyed.

From the positions held by Chester and Lieutenant Bennings rifles still spoke, indicating that the Germans seeking escape there had not realized their desperate plight. But soon these too were stilled.

The shacks now were a seething mass of flames. Outside, in the glow of the fire, Hal's seven men from the darkness covered a score of Germans who stood with hands raised high in the air. Still the enemy could not see the Americans and consequently had no means of telling their strength.

"Chester!" called Hal.

"All right!" Chester shouted back.

"March your prisoners around in front here and line 'em up with the others!" yelled Hal.

Five minutes later the batch of prisoners covered by Hal's men was reinforced by more than a score of others, rounded up by Chester and Lieutenant Bennings.

"I'll cover 'em, Chester," said Hal. "Take your men and tie 'em up."

Chester followed instructions. Then the Americans approached their prisoners. Hal's eyes searched them for the officer in command. At last

he espied him and approached. But even as Hal would have addressed him something happened.

Half a dozen rifles cracked in the distance. Hal's cap leaped from his head.

CHAPTER XIX

STUBBS GETS LOST

So unexpected was this attack from the darkness that for a moment the little body of Americans was stunned. Chester was the first to recover himself.

"Quick, Hal!" he shouted. "Out of the light!"

Even as he spoke there was a second volley from the darkness and a soldier next to Chester staggered slightly.

The Americans dashed for the shelter of the distant trees.

Once out of the circle of light cast by the burning buildings, the Americans were safe enough for the moment. The night was still very dark and it was impossible for either Americans or their enemies to see each other.

Chester stopped running at the edge of the wood.

"Hal!" he called.

"Here!" said the latter, halting, panting, by his chum.

Other figures now came up in the darkness.

"Lieutenant Bennings!" called Hal.

"Here, sir," said the lieutenant and stepped forward.

"Check up on your men, lieutenant," Hal commanded. "Some of them may have gone astray in the darkness."

Lieutenant Bennings did as commanded.

"They're all here, sir," he reported, "though one man is wounded."

"Good enough," said Hal. "Now what are we going to do?"

"Wonder who the fellows are who jumped us?" asked Chester.

"Germans," replied Hal laconically. "That's all I can tell you."

"It's pretty tough to have lost all our prisoners," declared Lieutenant Bennings.

"So it is," Chester agreed. "But there was no sense remaining in full view of the enemy for that bunch of Boches."

"I should say not," Hal agreed. "All we could do was run and we're lucky to all be here."

Suddenly Chester uttered an exclamation.

"What's the matter now?" demanded Hal.

"Where's Stubbs?" demanded Chester.

Hal uttered an expression of alarm.

"By George! I forgot all about him," he declared. "We must have left him back there in the darkness some place."

"We'll have to go back after him," said Chester. "That's all there is about it."

"Right," Hal agreed; "and the sooner we start the better."

"Wait, sir," said Lieutenant Bennings as Hal and Chester moved off. "You'll never find him that way."

"What would you suggest, lieutenant?" asked Hal, halting in his tracks.

"We'll spread out as far as possible, sir," said Bennings. "In that way we may round him up."

"Good idea," said Hal. "Spread out, men."

The men followed instructions, even Fisher, the wounded soldier, taking his place in the long line. Thus they moved forward in the darkness.

The line groped its way along slowly. It was still too dark for the eye to penetrate more than a few yards in the darkness and for this reason progress was difficult.

Several times Hal was on the point of raising his voice in a shout, but he restrained himself each time, for he knew that any such sound would betray their whereabouts to the enemy. There was nothing to do but trust to luck, Hal decided.

Now Stubbs, when Chester gave the command to flee after the unexpected attack, was one of the first to take to his heels. But, as is frequently the case in the darkness, he lost his sense of direction and in-

stead of following the route taken by the other Americans he dashed off at almost a right angle.

When he came to the fringe of trees in that direction he halted and waited for the others to come up; but no one came. When ten minutes had passed, Stubbs realized that he had gone the wrong way. He grew alarmed.

"By George! This is no place for a man to be all by himself," he muttered. "Guess I'd better go back the way I came and try and get the proper direction."

Accordingly he started back toward where a dull glow marked the spot of the burning German shacks. Almost at the edge of light thrown by the flames, he wheeled abruptly and at last found himself going toward Hal, Chester and their party.

Having become lost once, however, Stubbs was by no means certain in his own mind that he was traveling in the proper direction, so he advanced with extreme caution, stopping every now and then and listening intently.

Suddenly the little war correspondent's heart leaped into his throat. Approaching him he beheld a long line of men treading slowly and noiselessly. Even as he espied them he knew that his own presence had been discovered, for two of the central figures in the line left their companions and dashed toward him.

"Wow!" muttered Stubbs. "It's up to you to run, Anthony."

Turning abruptly, he suited the action to the word and raced back toward the burning shacks as fast as his peculiar legs would carry him—and this in spite of the fact that, had he stopped to think, he would have known he was rushing straight into the hands of the Germans.

But Anthony Stubbs did not stop to think. All he thought about at that moment was putting the greatest distance between himself and the two forms that sped swiftly after him.

The sound of footsteps behind him told him that his pursuers were gaining. Stubbs redoubled his efforts, but the little man was now running faster than his feet could carry him. He stumbled and pitched to the ground. Instantly his pursuers pounced on him and jerked him to his feet.

"Don't be a fool, Mr. Stubbs," said a well-known voice.

"Wh—what? Is that you, Hal?" demanded Stubbs.

"You bet it is," was Hal's response. "What are you trying to do? Lead us into the heart of the German army?"

"How was I to know it was you?" demanded Stubbs heatedly. "Why didn't you call me?"

"And tell every German within forty miles where we are?" demanded Chester. "Not even for you,

Mr. Stubbs. You had no business getting lost in the first place."

"You don't think I got lost on purpose, do you?" asked Stubbs.

"It's too deep for me why you did it," was Chester's response. "But come, we've got to get back. Better hang on to me this time, Stubbs. We can't be bothered looking all over France for you again."

Stubbs muttered something unintelligible to himself, but he followed Hal and Chester without protest.

So they came to the other Americans again.

"I see you got him, all right," remarked Lieutenant Bennings. "From the way he streaked it over the ground when you started after him, sir, I didn't think you'd overtake him this side of Berlin. What'd he run for?"

"Why, lieutenant," said Hal, "Mr. Stubbs considers himself something of a sprinter and he wanted to exhibit his ability. That's all."

"But surely," protested Bennings, "he knew he was running directly toward the enemy?"

"Mr. Stubbs, lieutenant," said Chester gravely, "didn't know very much at that particular moment except that he was awfully scared."

"Scared, was I?" interposed Stubbs. "You're mighty right I was scared. Who wouldn't have been scared, let me ask you? Here you fellows come, creeping up on me, and then a couple of you

jump for me. I learned wisdom many years ago. 'Discretion is the better part of valor,' the poet, or somebody says. I ran. What else was I to do?"

"That's all right, Mr. Stubbs," said Hal. "I would have done the same thing in your place. Don't let them joke you, Mr. Stubbs."

"Well, I can't stop 'em, can I?" demanded Stubbs. "You're in command of this expedition. Let's see you stop 'em."

"I'll do it, Mr. Stubbs," said Hal. He turned to the others. "No time for joking now, Chester," he added. "We're in rather a ticklish situation here, if you ask me. We've Germans in front of us, Germans behind us and Germans we know to one side of us. How are we going to get through 'em?"

"You being in command, it strikes me it's up to you," returned Chester.

"That being the case," said Hal, "we'll just sit tight until daylight."

"Suits me," said Chester, and flung himself down on the ground.

The others followed his example.

"Seems to me," said Hal, "that it would be well to get a little sleep. This hard ground may not make the best bed in the world, but I've slept on worse, many's the time."

"We'll have to post a watch, then," said Lieutenant Bennings.

"Right," said Hal. "Stubbs here and I will stand

the first two hours. Then we'll wake you and Chester. When your two hours are up, you can pick a couple of other men. The rest of you turn in now."

The men needed no urging. Soon they were fast asleep.

"Say, Hal," called Stubbs presently.

"Say yourself," Hal called back. "What do you want?"

"I want to know," replied Stubbs, "why you couldn't call to me when I started to run awhile back?"

"I told you once. Because it would have betrayed our presence to the enemy."

"Well, then you'd better take your rifle barrel and stir up some of these snorers here," said Stubbs significantly. "They snore so loud the Kaiser can hear 'em in Berlin."

Hal smiled in the darkness.

"Not a bad idea, Stubbs," he answered. "I'll appoint you custodian of the snorers. Every time a man snores, wake him up."

"Better wake him up just before he snores, that would be more to the point," mumbled the war correspondent.

He took his rifle and passed from one sleeper to another, gently prodding those from whom emanated strange noises.

Then he resumed his place.

The night continued quiet while Hal and Stubbs

stood watch. There was not a sound to signify that Germans were near. Even the roar of battle in the distance had died down. Only the occasional voice of a big gun indicated that this was a battlefield.

At the expiration of two hours, Hal aroused Chester and Lieutenant Bennings.

"All right, Stubbs," he called when the others had assumed their posts, "time for us to take a little snooze. I guess nothing will happen before morning."

In this the lad proved a good guesser. Nothing happened to disturb their slumbers while it was yet dark, but trouble, strenuous and exciting, was to come with the first light of day.

CHAPTER XX

CAPTURED

HAL was awakened by a rifle shot and the sound of an American voice which cried in his ear:

"Here come the Germans!"

Hal sprang to his feet. The cry spread from mouth to mouth as other sleepers woke and jumped up with a rifle in one hand and rubbing the sleep from their eyes with the other.

Hal gazed across the open field. Coming toward them, in close formation, was a body of German

troops. How many men comprised this force, Hal was unable to tell at a glance, but his practiced eye told him that it was not less than a regiment.

Opposed to this force all that Hal could offer was twenty men besides Chester, Stubbs, Lieutenant Bennings and himself. Hal decided to seek safety in flight.

"One volley, men!" he cried.

In spite of the fact that the Germans fired first, the men calmly fell into line, brought their rifles to bear and poured a volley into the approaching mass of Germans. A dozen men dropped or staggered.

"One more!" cried Hal, "then run!"

Again the American rifles spoke and that their aim was true was proven by the confusion that followed in the ranks of the foe.

But there was no time for a third volley. The Germans were too close. Bullets cut the air above the Americans and on all sides of them.

"Back to the woods!" cried Hal.

The men needed no urging. One man staggered and fell before he could reach the comparative safety of the trees, but two of his companions stopped and dragged him along with them. A quick examination showed that the man was not severely wounded.

"To the right," shouted Hal, and the men followed him, running at a speed that made it difficult for the wounded man to keep up with them.

After five minutes' running, the Americans came to another little clearing in the woods. Across this they dashed rapidly. Then Hal called a halt.

"Deploy behind the trees here, men!" the lad cried. "We'll give them a warm reception if they come this way. We can fall back, fighting, from tree to tree."

The men obeyed orders with eagerness. There could be no doubt of the fact that all were eager to have another chance at the Germans.

Ten minutes later came the sound of tramping feet. The Americans, behind the trunks of the largest trees, were very quiet. So the enemy came on unsuspecting.

A dozen men left the shelter of the trees and advanced across the open. It was the moment for which Hal had been waiting. His voice rang out in a sharp command:

"Fire!"

Every tree fronting on the clearing, it must have seemed to the enemy, became a blazing fortress. Shot after shot the Americans poured upon the foe before their officers could bring order out of confusion, halt the mass pressing on from behind and get what was left of the vanguard back in the forest.

The execution of the American rifle fire had been terrific. A dozen or more men lay still on the ground. Others, wounded, had dragged themselves after their comrades.

And, so far, the enemy had not returned the Yankee fire.

But the answer came soon.

From every tree, bush and shelter of any kind across the open, came a hail of bullets. The Americans, sheltered as they were, could not remain long behind their trees without imminent risk of losing a number of their men, Hal knew. So he ordered a retirement.

Still pouring a furious fire upon the Germans across the open, the Americans retreated, flitting from tree to tree and exposing themselves as little as possible.

With six men, among them Stubbs, Hal remained in the front line, covering the retreat of the others. Thus the Germans did not know until the bulk of the Yankees had found another refuge that the line was not retained intact.

But when Hal and his men broke from their shelter and dashed back, the enemy crossed the open space in the woods with wild cries. The Americans farther back, with their powerful rifles, now protected the flight of Hal and his six companions, and these reached what was to be the American second line of defense without losing a man.

So far the Americans had not suffered a single fatal casualty since entering the woods. Hal, naturally, was somewhat proud of his generalship.

The fighting became fiercer now, as Americans and Germans blazed away at each other from behind trees, clumps of bushes or whatever other shelter presented itself.

An American soldier named James suddenly threw up his hands and pitched forward on his face. Despite the risk, Hal leaped forward and dragged the man back to his own shelter. But the risk was useless. The man was dead.

It was the first death in the Yankee force.

But there was no time to mourn over James' loss. There was still work to be done if Hal was to extricate his men from their dangerous situation.

The Germans were approaching so swiftly now and in such force that Hal realized the utter foolishness of further resistance.

"Only flight can save us," the lad muttered.

Hal was loath to flee from any German troops, no matter how superior their numbers, but the lad realized that he had more than himself to think of now. Only bad generalship would permit an officer to expose his men to almost certain annihilation.

"Run, men!" he called.

Brave men though they were, the Americans did not hesitate. It was no disgrace to retire in the face of such superior numbers. They darted back at full speed, still keeping as close together as possible.

At the end of fifteen minutes, Hal called a halt.

Then he gathered the men about him and addressed them.

"We're badly outnumbered, men," he said. "Further fighting is useless."

There was a murmur among the men.

"Don't misunderstand me," Hal added quickly. "I do not recommend a surrender. But I believe that if we stick together as we have been the enemy eventually will round us up and either kill or make prisoners of all of us. Now, my idea is to separate. Let it be each man for himself. The American lines are off there," and the lad waved his revolver toward the northwest. "Let each man make for our lines. Some of us will reach them. Some, perhaps, won't. The first man to arrive will spread the alarm and aid will be rushed to the others. With care and extreme caution, there is no reason why we may not all yet be saved."

There was a subdued cheer from the men.

"It might be better to go in pairs, or in threes, Hal," said Chester.

"The men must decide that for themselves, Chester," replied Hal. "Now, you and I and Stubbs will go this way," and he waved his arm toward the north. "Remember, men, if you're cornered it may be better to give up than to fight to the last. Are you all agreeable to this plan?"

There were cries of "Yes, yes" from the sol-

diers. A moment later they split up into small groups and moved swiftly away, going in the general direction of where Hal had indicated the American lines to be.

Hal, Chester and Stubbs moved off together. Lieutenant Bennings walked away with a soldier named Mason. Soon all lost sight of each other.

"Now," said Hal, "the three of us will bide here a while," and he took up a position behind a tree somewhat larger than the rest.

"What's the idea?" Stubbs wanted to know. "Are we going to sit here and wait for the Boches? Seems to me we should put as much distance as possible between us."

"The men are entitled to the first chance of safety, Mr. Stubbs," said Hal quietly. "We may be able to hold the Germans back long enough to assure their escape."

"By Jove, Hal!" said Chester. "I didn't think you were figuring on leaving all those fellows in the lurch, although it certainly did sound like it. They wouldn't have left us had they surmised what you meant."

"I know it," was Hal's response. "That's why I didn't explain. I noticed, however, that Lieutenant Bennings wasn't very well pleased with my orders."

"And I'm not very well pleased, either," declared Stubbs. "Why pick me out for this sort of work, I'd like to know?"

"Because we are personally responsible for your safety to General Traub, Mr. Stubbs," Hal replied quietly. "I want you where I can keep an eye on you."

"By Jove!" said Stubbs, "I'll relieve you from such responsibility in the future. I told the general something was bound to happen to me if I got mixed up with you fellows. And now it has happened."

"Not yet, Mr. Stubbs," said Chester calmly, "but it probably will. Here come the Germans now."

It was true.

Flitting toward them through the trees, Hal and Chester made out the forms of at least twenty of the enemy. Hal, standing behind his tree, covered one man with his rifle and pulled the trigger. Chester, from his position, did the same. Two men dropped.

For a moment Stubbs hesitated. He seemed bent on flight. Then he calmly took his position behind a third tree, raised his rifle and fired. A third German tumbled over. The others took refuge behind trees and returned the fire of the three friends.

"At least we can hold them up awhile, Chester," Hal called.

"Right you are," was Chester's response. "The other fellows should get a good start."

But, as it developed, the lads were not to hold the enemy in check as long as they had hoped.

Hearing the sounds of firing ahead, the German captain in command of one detachment ordered his men to make a slight detour. By this move he was able to get behind the three friends.

The first Hal knew they were between two fires was when he heard the voice of a rifle from the rear and a bullet grazed his cheek. He wheeled quickly, just in time to meet the onrush of the enemy.

The fighting was at such close quarters now that Hal could not even use his revolver. Chester and Stubbs also were mixed up in the *mêlée*. A rifle butt descended on Stubbs' head and he went to the ground and lay still. Less than a minute later, a similar blow laid Hal low.

Chester continued the struggle single-handed. But an unequal combat such as this could have but one ending. As he raised his revolver to strike down a German officer, strong hands seized him from behind and rendered him powerless. Chester ceased his struggles.

"You've got me," he cried in a choking voice. "I surrender!"

But this was not enough for the Huns. A clubbed revolver was raised aloft, an arm descended. The butt struck Chester's head and the lad dropped like a log.

CHAPTER XXI

UNEXPECTED AID

HAL was just regaining consciousness when rude hands jerked him to his feet.

"Get up!" exclaimed a harsh German voice.

With this unwelcome assistance, the lad was able to stand. He passed a hand over his sore head and felt there a large lump.

"Pretty good blow, if anyone asks me," said Hal to himself, trying to be as cheerful as possible. "Wonder what they've done to Chester and Stubbs?"

He glanced around. A short distance away Stubbs was held in the powerful grasp of a pair of German soldiers. Near him, Chester lay prone. But even as Hal looked a German sergeant bent over the lad, and jerked him to his feet. Hal saw that his chum was not critically wounded.

"Guess we should be thankful for that," Hal mumbled to himself.

The hands that held him now shook him roughly.

"Stand by yourself," said a voice.

Hal did so. A few moments later Chester and Stubbs were lined up beside him. Hal smiled at them ruefully.

"How do you feel, old man?" he asked of Chester.

"Pretty good, all things considering," was the reply. "I thought when I saw you go down they had killed you, but I see they haven't."

"I'm good for a dozen Germans yet," declared Hal. "How about you, Mr. Stubbs?"

"I don't think I'm good for anything any more," was Stubbs' answer. "I feel as though that revolver butt had knocked out whatever brains I may have had."

"Which would be a severe blow to the *New York Gazette*, I'm afraid," said Chester sarcastically.

"This is no time for jesting, Chester," protested Stubbs. "It's a wonder we weren't all killed."

"Don't crow, Mr. Stubbs," put in Hal. "They haven't finished with us yet, you know."

"But we're prisoners now," said Stubbs, "and are entitled to the treatment accorded all prisoners of war."

"That's what I'm afraid of," replied Hal. "The treatment the Huns accord their prisoners doesn't meet with my approval, I can tell you that. I've had some experience along that line."

"And I," said Chester.

Stubbs would have replied, but the words died in his throat as a German officer approached, a lieutenant of infantry his bars proclaimed him.

"You will precede me to the quarters of General Clugg," said the lieutenant, and motioned them on ahead of him.

There was nothing for the three prisoners to do but obey. The lieutenant followed them closely and he, in turn, was followed by a squad of soldiers.

After ten minutes' march they came upon a small tent pitched alone in the midst of the forest. The German lieutenant motioned them to enter. This they did, and found themselves facing a man above the average stature, heavily bearded and with a pair of the most cruel eyes Hal thought it had ever been his misfortune to see. Hal and Chester stood at attention, as behooved their military rank. Stubbs eyed the German general curiously.

"Your names and rank?" demanded the general without ceremony.

Chester answered for all three.

"What were you doing in this forest?" was the next question.

"We thought we were within our lines, sir," said Chester. "That is, until we found ourselves confronted by German troops."

"Then why didn't you surrender at once?"

"There were twenty or more of us at the time," was Chester's reply. "Why should we?"

"Pouf!" exclaimed the general. "What could twenty men do against us?"

Hal was forced to smile.

"Well, they did quite a bit of damage, sir," he replied.

The general brought a clenched fist down on the little desk before him.

"Himmel!" he exclaimed. "Could it be that you were responsible for the burning of our snipers' rendezvous?"

Hal bowed.

"We had that good fortune, sir," he replied.

General Clugg sprang to his feet angrily.

"For that you shall be punished!" he declared. "You have destroyed one of the most important pivots in my line. But first, I will have some information from you."

Hal said nothing, but he determined that no important military information should be wrung from him that might prove advantageous to the enemy.

"First," said General Clugg, "are American forces fighting in the Argonne forest alone, or have they the assistance of French and British troops?"

"I can see no harm in answering that question," was Hal's reply. "The Americans are holding the forest without assistance, sir."

"So I have been told," said General Clugg, "but I didn't believe it. I suppose you will tell me, too, that it was an American force that broke through the Prussian Guard at Chateau Thierry in June?"

"It was, sir; a force of American marines, as-

sisted by a single division of regular army troops."

"Himmel!" exclaimed the general again. "You are expecting me to believe too much, even as others have done. What you say is impossible. How could raw troops stand up in the face of our veterans?"

Hal shrugged his shoulders.

"They did it, sir," he replied.

"We'll pass that for the moment," said General Clugg. "Now I want you to tell me the strength of the American forces on this front."

Hal was silent.

"Do you hear me?" demanded General Clugg.

"Yes, sir."

"Then why don't you answer; or don't you know?"

"Yes, sir, I know, approximately," replied Hal quietly.

"Then answer me."

Again Hal was silent.

"You mean that you will defy me?" demanded General Clugg after waiting some moments in silence.

"I won't answer that question," replied Hal firmly.

"Oh, you won't, eh? I have seen others like you, but they were glad to talk before I got through with them."

"I'm afraid you'll find me a bit different," said Hal.

The general looked at the lad long and earnestly. Apparently he was impressed by what he read in Hal's face. He turned to Chester.

"Perhaps you will answer my question?" he queried.

Chester shook his head.

"No," he replied quietly.

"Donnerwetter!" exclaimed the angry general. "I'll find a way to make you. But first I'll have a word with this other man. Step up here, sir."

Stubbs approached the general.

"Why don't you stand at attention?" demanded General Clugg in a harsh voice.

Stubbs smiled at him.

"Why should I?" he wanted to know.

General Clugg for the moment was taken aback. He stuttered and stammered and then said:

"If for no other reason than to show you are a soldier."

"But I'm not a soldier," replied Stubbs easily. "Captain Paine here informed you of that fact some time ago."

"True," muttered General Clugg. "I forgot. Well, so much the better. You will not have the scruples of these officers in furnishing me with the information I desire."

Stubbs stood still, but said nothing.

"Now," continued General Clugg, "I wish you to

tell me the strength of the American forces in the Argonne forest."

"I won't do it," declared Stubbs, with a peculiar light in his eye.

"Oh, you won't, eh?" shouted the German general, taking a step forward.

Stubbs stood his ground.

"No, I won't," he said again.

For a moment General Clugg was stumped.

"Himmel!" he said at last. "You Americans are the limit. Answer me now. Why don't you tell me?"

"Because it's none of your business," was Stubbs' reply.

"How dare you?" exclaimed General Clugg. "How dare you speak to one of his majesty's officers like that. I'll have you shot!"

Stubbs nodded his head slowly.

"I haven't a doubt of it," said he. "It would be about your size."

"My size?" queried the general, puzzled. "What do you mean?"

"I mean," replied Stubbs firmly, "that you and your ilk are so small, so low and contemptible, that I wouldn't be surprised at anything you might do."

"Enough!" shouted the enraged general. "Shot you shall be, all of you, and within the hour."

He stamped to the door of his tent and summoned the lieutenant who had taken his stand without.

"Summon Captain Lutz and a squad of soldiers," he cried. "These men shall be executed at once!"

He returned to his desk and sat down. He wiped his moist brow with a quivering hand. Plainly, General Clugg had not been so excited in many days.

A few moments later a German officer entered and saluted. Hal knew that this must be Captain Lutz.

"Take these men out and shoot them at once!" ordered General Clugg.

The newcomer gazed at the lads a moment and gave a sudden start. Then he addressed General Clugg.

"Your pardon, sir," he said, "but I beg that you will not insist upon this execution."

"What's that?" exclaimed the general, getting to his feet again in a single bound. "How dare you question my orders? I say they shall be shot at once. Who are you to interfere with my commands?"

"I am merely Captain Lutz, sir," was the reply, "but at the same time I am high in the confidence of his excellency, the Crown Prince, as you know. Also I am familiar with the edict that has gone forth against the execution of prisoners of war. I protest against this execution, sir!"

General Clugg sank back into his chair.

"Himmel!" he exclaimed again. "What is the world coming to?"

CHAPTER XXII

CAPTAIN LUTZ UNMASKS

ONCE more the sorely tried German commander passed a hand across a moist brow.

"What is the world coming to?" he repeated.

Captain Lutz smiled slightly, but made no reply for a moment. At last he said:

"Did I understand you to say, sir, that you had rescinded your order for the execution?"

Again General Clugg was on his feet.

"Yes!" he shouted. "Yes! The order is rescinded. Take them away and see that they are well guarded. No wonder our enemies are driving us back. No wonder we were unable to drive through to Paris. Without discipline, the German army is going to the dogs. I wish some one would tell me why the execution of prisoners has been ordered stopped?"

"For several reasons, general," was Captain Lutz's reply. "In the first place, the British and French have threatened to take retaliatory measures. In the second, the general staff is not in favor of further arousing our enemies by unnecessary cruelty. It may be that some day we shall need sympathy that we will be unable to get."

"Pouf!" exclaimed the general. "Who wants sympathy? Take no prisoners, is my motto! Show no quarter. Now take these men away!"

Captain Lutz saluted and motioned Stubbs and the two lads to follow him. He led the way from the tent.

"I'm taking you to my quarters," he explained as they walked along. "You shall, of course, be prisoners there, but I believe I can assure you that you will come to no harm."

"Thanks," said Chester quietly. "We are grateful to you, captain, for the general was evidently sincere in his desire to have us shot."

"Oh, he was sincere enough," admitted Captain Lutz. "To tell the truth, General Clugg hasn't a whole lot of use for me. I have had occasion to thwart some of his plans several times."

"By Jove!" muttered Hal. "Things must have changed in the German army. I had no idea a captain could interfere with his superiors like that."

"Neither can he, in most cases," said Captain Lutz. "But, fortunately for you, this chances to be an extraordinary case. I told the truth when I said I was close to the Crown Prince. You see, the prince often comes to me for advice, strange as it may seem."

"It seems little short of remarkable," declared Chester.

"That's because you don't know all the facts,"

smiled Captain Lutz. "You see, in the first place he knows I have lived in America and for this reason am in closer touch with the feelings of the American people than most German officers; and it's the Americans now that the Crown Prince and the Kaiser are more afraid of than anybody else. In fact, they are both willing to go a long ways to help pacify your country."

"Well, America will never be pacified now without Germany's unconditional surrender," declared Hal.

"No one knows that better than I do," said Captain Lutz quietly. "But here we are at my quarters. Please come in."

The three friends followed Captain Lutz into an improvised wooden structure which consisted of a single room. The officer kicked stools toward them.

"Make yourselves at home," he said. "We shall not be disturbed here, and we can talk over without interruption plans for your escape!"

Hal, Chester and Stubbs came to their feet with a bound.

"What's that?" demanded Chester, scarcely believing he could have heard aright. "Our es——"

Captain Lutz laid a finger to his lips.

"Sh-h-h!" he whispered. He glanced quickly around, and continued: "It is true there is little likelihood of our being interrupted, but in a position like mine a man can't be too careful."

The three Americans gazed at him in open-eyed wonder.

"But—but——" stammered Stubbs.

Captain Lutz smiled.

"I'll admit it seems very queer," he said, "but please take my word that I'm your friend."

"But you're a German officer," protested Chester.

"So I am," said Captain Lutz, "ostensibly."

"What!" exclaimed Hal. "You mean——"

Again Captain Lutz laid a finger to his lips.

"That's just what I mean," he said in a low voice.

"Draw your stools closer and I'll explain."

The others did as enjoined. Captain Lutz was silent a moment, apparently lost in thought.

"Two of you I know," he said at last. "I mean you, Captain Paine, and you, Captain Crawford."

For a third time the lads were moved to amazement and again Captain Lutz smiled.

"The third man here," he continued, indicating Stubbs, "I do not know, and I must ask your assurances that he is to be trusted perfectly."

"We know him well," was Hal's reply, "and he can be trusted to the last ditch."

"Very well, then," said Captain Lutz. "I may clear up the situation somewhat by explaining that I am not really Captain Lutz, a captain in the German army, but Colonel Tom Lutz, of General Pershing's staff!"

Stubbs and the two lads were beyond amaze-

ment now. They had heard so many strange things in the last few minutes, that it seemed they must believe anything.

"But how did you know us, colonel?" asked Hal at last.

"Why," was the reply, "I chanced to be present at General Pershing's conference with Marshal Foch when you two boys were ordered into Germany in quest of information that eventually resulted in the American drive at Chateau Thierry. I never forget a face."

"By Jove!" said Chester. "It's lucky for us you were there, and recognized us now."

"It is, indeed," was the reply. "But I suppose you wonder how I chance to be wearing a German uniform and to be a person of such influence?"

"We do, indeed," declared Anthony Stubbs.

"Well, it's a very simple matter after all," said Colonel Lutz, for such we shall call him hereafter. "I have a brother Hans, who is, or rather was, a captain of German infantry. He is my twin. Now we both were brought up in Germany—attended school in Berlin and both served our terms in the German army. Then I went with my mother to America. There I became an American. From my youth I have been an enemy of autocracy and the idea of German militarism. I am a United States citizen now. At the outbreak of the war between Germany and America I attended one of the officers'

training schools. My military training stood me in good stead. I came to Europe a captain. Since then I have been promoted."

"I see," said Hal. "But how did you come here, colonel?"

"Several months ago," continued the colonel, "near Verdun I ran across my brother, a prisoner. Despite his inclinations against war, he had been forced to take up arms with the others of his class, but he was glad to be out of the war. He told me that many German soldiers thought the Kaiser was in the wrong, and that they would like to quit fighting and return to their homes. Then I evolved the idea of taking his place. I made my way to the German lines as an escaped prisoner and rejoined my brother's regiment. That is all."

"But why?" demanded Stubbs.

"Cannot you guess?" exclaimed Colonel Lutz. "To get information, of course."

"And have you got it?" asked Chester.

Colonel Lutz smiled.

"I have," he said quietly. "But there may be danger getting back to the American lines. That is why I am glad I ran across you. I shall impart to each of you what information I have. One of us much reach General Pershing with it."

"And one of us will!" exclaimed Stubbs excitedly.

"There is still something that puzzles me," remarked Chester a few moments later.

"And that?" asked Colonel Lutz.

"Why," said Chester, "a short time ago you told General Clugg you were in the confidence of the Crown Prince. Surely the Crown Prince must know that you are not your brother, for you say your brother was never in America."

"I didn't say he wasn't," was Colonel Lutz's reply, "but it is true all the same. The fact is that my brother never came beneath the personal observation of the Crown Prince. But gaining the confidence of some one high in authority was one of my first jobs after reaching the German lines. Fortunately, I chanced to be of service to the Crown Prince. I saved him a fall from his horse. He thanked me, and talked with me for a moment. It was then that I let him know I knew something of Americans and American customs. That interested him. I may even say that it was partly due to the talks with him that orders to cease the mistreatment of prisoners were issued by the general staff."

"By George!" said Stubbs, "your career reads like a piece of fiction, colonel. It will make a great Sunday story for the *New York Gazette* when I get back home."

Colonel Lutz waved a deprecatory hand.

"I'm not doing this for glory, Mr. Stubbs," he said quietly. "My adopted country was in need of my services, and I offered them. That's all."

"And it's enough!" declared Stubbs. "I'd like to shake your hand, colonel."

The two men shook hands.

"And now," said Colonel Lutz, "for the details of your escape."

"We'll have to leave that to you, colonel," said Hal. "You have considerable authority here. Surely it should not be difficult."

"It wouldn't, ordinarily," was the reply. "But day before yesterday orders were issued that no man could leave the lines without written permission of General Clugg."

"Surely you can get that?" asked Chester.

"Hardly," was the grim response. "In view of what has happened just now, the general will take keen delight in turning me down."

"But there must be other ways," protested Hal.

"There are," said Colonel Lutz. "Now listen carefully."

The four drew close together and for the next hour Colonel Lutz talked to them carefully and guardedly. At last he pushed back his stool.

"Then we shall make the attempt to-night," he said simply.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE ESCAPE

"I WILL have to report to General Clugg that you are safely confined," said Colonel Lutz at length; "and in the meantime, for the sake of appearances, I must throw a guard around this shack. I won't be gone longer than I can help."

He took his departure. Hal, glancing from the tent, saw that the colonel had kept his word in reference to the guard. Half a dozen German soldiers were posted outside. Hal rejoined his friends.

In the distance could be heard the intermittent roar of German and American artillery fire. The crash of machine guns and rifles came only faintly to the ears of the three prisoners. The direction of the firing indicated to Hal and Chester that the American advance to the north was still in progress.

"It won't take many days now to drive them out of the forest," said Chester.

"I hope not," replied Hal. "And once that job is completed the rest should be easy."

"Easier, at any rate," declared Stubbs. "But the thing that is of essential interest to us right now is getting out of the hands of the enemy."

"If I'm any judge, Colonel Lutz will see us

through, all right," said Chester. "He's taking awfully long chances, if you ask me."

"He is, indeed," agreed Hal. "He's a brave man."

Colonel Lutz returned within the hour.

"I guess everything's all right," he said. "I have managed to be relieved of active duty for the rest of the day, so we can spend the time here gossiping. I don't know how long General Clugg intends to stay in this locality. He doesn't take me into his confidence. But from the activity about the camp, I imagine he intends to shift his position after dark."

"That's the time we want to make our break," said Hal.

"Exactly; and I'm sure we shall get through without difficulty."

"Here's hoping," said Anthony Stubbs.

Colonel Lutz produced a pad of paper and for some minutes scribbled rapidly.

"Here," he said at length, "is the gist of what information I have been able to gather during my impersonation of my brother Hans." He gave a sheet of paper to Hal, Chester and Stubbs, each in turn. "Certainly one of us should get through," he continued, "and I want to impress upon all of you the necessity of delivering this information at once into the hands of General Pershing."

"Oh, I guess you will survive to complete your task, colonel," said Hal with a laugh.

Colonel Lutz shrugged his shoulders expressively.

"A man can't tell what's going to happen," he said quietly. "It's best to be on the safe side."

Chester stuffed the paper into his left boot.

"Guess I won't lose it there," was his comment.

Hal and Stubbs followed Chester's example.

The day passed slowly; always it is the hours of inactivity that drag the heaviest. But it grew dark at last and Colonel Lutz began his preparations for departure.

First, he ordered the men on guard before the tent away. The latter went without question, for it was not in their line of duty to question the activities of their superiors.

It was half past eight o'clock when Colonel Lutz glanced at his watch and announced:

"Time to be moving."

Hal, Chester and Stubbs followed him to the door of the tent.

"Guns ready?" asked the colonel.

Each of the prisoners replied in the affirmative. The colonel had supplied them with weapons during the day, and these now rested in their pockets.

"Then let's go," said Colonel Lutz.

He led the way from the tent. The others followed him closely.

Suddenly Colonel Lutz came to a pause.

"Hello!" he ejaculated. "The camp's astir. I

was afraid Clugg might pick this moment to change his position. However, it can't be helped."

The air resounded with the noise of tramping feet. Men rushed hither and thither. It was perfectly plain to the eye of a military man that the Germans were preparing to break camp.

"What's the idea?" whispered Stubbs. "Where's Clugg going?"

"Back to his own lines," was Colonel Lutz's reply. "American activity in the Argonne has been too feverish lately for German comfort. The general staff undoubtedly knows that the woods cannot be held in the face of our advance. Clugg probably has received orders to fall back. That means that we will have to run the gauntlet of an extra set of outposts before we are safe."

"Well, let's start running 'em, then," muttered Stubbs.

"Patience, Mr. Stubbs," cautioned Colonel Lutz. "Nothing was ever gained by undue haste. All in good time. Follow me."

He led the way toward the west.

"The American lines should be closer in this direction," he explained.

They passed bodies of moving troops on all sides, but were not molested. Gradually the moving figures grew fewer, however, and then Colonel Lutz announced that further progress must be made with greater caution.

"We'll be challenged now if discovered," he said.

A body of perhaps a dozen Germans approached Colonel Lutz wheeled sharply to the left and strode quickly away, the others following him closely. In the darkness the approaching Germans did not see them.

"Pretty lucky that time," whispered the colonel. "We'll get through yet."

But they were not to be so fortunate in the next encounter.

Stepping from the dense foliage of the trees, Colonel Lutz, with the others close behind him, suddenly found himself confronted by a sergeant and a squad of half a dozen soldiers, who barred his way.

"It's all right, sergeant," called the colonel in German.

But the enemy still barred his path.

"I'm sorry, captain," said the Teuton sergeant, "but I have orders to allow no one to pass here without express orders from General Clugg himself."

"But surely you know me, sergeant," protested Colonel Lutz.

"Yes, sir, but orders are orders and must be obeyed."

"Very true, sergeant. You are a good soldier. The thing for me to do, then, is to get a pass."

"And a pass for the prisoners as well, sir, if you are going to take them in this direction."

"Very well, sergeant. I shall return with the passes presently."

The sergeant saluted, and Colonel Lutz motioned Stubbs and the two lads to follow him back into the woods.

"We'll have to make a detour and get around those fellows," he whispered. "We'll try another quick dash to the left. Hurry!"

He set off at a run, the others close behind.

Had Colonel Lutz been aware of the thoughts that ran through the German sergeant's head while he conversed with him, he probably would have thought twice before attempting his present ruse.

Though the sergeant had recognized Colonel Lutz as the German captain, at the same time his suspicions had been aroused by the sight of the three prisoners, neither bound nor apparently well guarded.

"It may be all right and it may not be," the sergeant muttered to himself. "If it is, and he comes this way with his passes it will not matter whether I'm here or not. But if it isn't all right, he'll try to get around me. Now the question is which way will he go?"

The sergeant turned this over in his mind a moment. Then he reached a decision.

"He'll go south," he said. He turned to his men. "Right wheel!" he commanded. "Forward at the double!"

The soldiers broke into a run, the sergeant at their head.

Thus it was that when Colonel Lutz and his friends again emerged from the woods they were encountered by the men who had stopped them farther back. In the darkness, Colonel Lutz did not recognize the sergeant's face. He advanced toward the Germans.

"Halt!" ordered the sergeant.

"What's the meaning of this, sir?" demanded Colonel Lutz, approaching. "How dare you interfere with me, sir?"

"Thought you'd get away from me, didn't you?" said the sergeant. "But I was up to your tricks, Captain Lutz."

It was then that the colonel recognized the sergeant as the man who had accosted him only a few moments before. He realized that the situation was serious, and decided upon prompt measures.

"Guns!" he whispered to the others.

"Hands up!" cried the German sergeant. "My men have you covered!"

"Well, we can't help that," muttered Colonel Lutz and called out:

"Fire!"

Hal's and Chester's revolvers flashed simultaneously. Stubbs fired a moment later. Colonel Lutz, for his part, sprang upon the German sergeant and stifled the cry to fire in the man's throat.

Two Germans dropped to the ground at the first volley. This left the odds only five to four in favor of the enemy.

"We can handle this crowd, all right," Chester muttered.

The opposing forces now came together with a crash.

Colonel Lutz put a leg behind the German sergeant and tumbled the latter to the ground. Quickly he stooped and brought the butt of his automatic down on the man's head. Then he turned to lend assistance to his friends.

Hal had succeeded in placing his opponent *hors du combat*, and Chester at the moment was holding his own with another. This left two of the enemy to face Stubbs.

The little man had sprung forward with the others, determined to do the best he could. But two Germans were too many for him to handle, and he was getting the worst of a bad bargain when Colonel Lutz sprang to his aid. The colonel dropped one of the men with a single shot, and then closed in on the other. The German was helpless in a trice.

At the same time Chester succeeded in getting a powerful grip on his antagonist's throat, and choked the man into submission.

"There! That job is done," said Colonel Lutz. "Now to get away from here."

But even as he spoke there was a rifle shot from

the woods nearby. Colonel Lutz, Hal, Chester and Stubbs swung about as one man to meet this new menace.

CHAPTER XXIV

COLONEL LUTZ DIES

"BACK!" cried Colonel Lutz, at the same time firing his revolver toward half a dozen or more figures that rushed toward them in the darkness.

Stubbs, Hal and Chester also blazed away at their new enemies before following the colonel. The effect of the shots none of the four fugitives could make out, for a second later they were hidden from sight by the trees.

"Looks like we had poked our heads into a hornet's nest," declared Stubbs, as the four moved rapidly northward through the woods.

"I can't account for the newcomers," said Colonel Lutz. "The first men we encountered, I take it, were part of the outposts. Apparently, however, General Clugg has stationed men even farther back to give warning of a possible advance by the American forces."

"That means that there must be more of the enemy between us and our own lines," remarked Chester.

"I'm afraid so," replied Colonel Lutz. "How-

ever, we'll go a mile or so north, and then strike west again. We'll have to leave something to chance."

"Suits me," said Hal.

Half an hour later Colonel Lutz again led the way sharply to the west. It was very dark and progress was made only through the sense of direction of the fugitives. It would be easy enough, Hal knew, to get lost in this vast woods if once they lost their direction. For this reason they went forward slowly and with extreme caution, dodging trees here and skirting fallen logs there, but always keeping to their path.

Colonel Lutz stopped abruptly; the others came to a pause. For a moment the colonel listened intently, then moved forward again, bearing off a trifle to the north.

"Germans back there!" he whispered to Chester, who was nearest him.

The lad made no reply and the four trudged on in silence.

Several times Colonel Lutz halted suddenly, then changed their route a trifle. While neither Hal, Chester nor Stubbs perceived signs of the enemy, they knew that Colonel Lutz must have come upon something in each case that he desired to avoid.

For almost an hour now they moved along without encountering an obstacle, and Hal was just beginning to breathe more easily.

"We'll be safe enough soon," the lad muttered.

But in this Hal was wrong.

In the darkness the lad stumbled over something that gave forth a startled grunt. It was the sound of a human voice.

Hal stooped over quickly and encountered a man as the latter tried to rise. Quickly Hal raised his revolver above his head and brought the butt down sharply.

There was a crunch as the weapon struck solid substance and Hal felt the form beneath him relax and topple over. But in the darkness the lad had not been able to judge the position of his foe accurately, and the blow had struck the man on the side of the forehead instead of squarely on the crown.

Before Hal could strike again, had such been his intention, all four fugitives were startled by a wild German yell.

"Help! Help!" came the voice.

"Stop him!" cried Colonel Lutz sharply.

Again Hal's revolver rose and fell; and there was no further outcry from the German.

"He must have aroused every sleepy German outpost in ten miles," declared Chester. "We'll have to get away from here."

"Let's go, then," said Stubbs.

Colonel Lutz was about to lead the way when he was halted by the sound of many tramping feet.

"Too late!" he whispered. "We're surrounded; they're coming from all directions."

"We can't afford to be captured," said Hal hurriedly; "particularly you, colonel. I'm in favor of a dash. We'll take them by surprise. Some of us may get through."

For a moment Colonel Lutz hesitated.

"All right," he said at last.

"Come on, then!" cried Hal.

Despite the danger of rushing headlong into one of the trees, which were visible only at a few yards, Hal dashed forward. Chester followed his chum closely, while Colonel Lutz came next. Stubbs brought up in the rear.

As Hal ran, the sound of other feet became more audible and the lad knew that he was rushing directly upon his foes.

They met less than two minutes later, in a little clearing. Without stopping to ascertain the approximate number of the foes, the fugitives sprang upon them. It made no difference, Hal knew, whether the Germans numbered five or five hundred. The Americans were attacking and it was up to them to break through if possible, outnumbered two or three to one though they might be.

The foremost German line held like a wall as the four hurled themselves upon it. Hal was conscious of countless dark and scowling faces, but he had no time for further thought. A rifle blow was aimed

at his head. Hal parried the blow with his left arm and fired his revolver squarely in the face of the man who delivered it.

He had no time to watch the effect of this bullet, for he was too close pressed from other directions.

The four friends now found themselves in the midst of a fighting, struggling, shouting mass. They struck out right and left as best they could, firing whenever opportunity offered.

Gradually the Germans drew back in the face of this terrific charge. In the darkness, it must have seemed to them that they had been attacked by a much stronger force. As the enemy drew off, the fugitives sprang forward with renewed vigor and shouts.

"Get 'em, fellows!" shouted Chester.

He fired the last two shots in his automatic at a pair of German soldiers who rushed him simultaneously, then clubbed his revolver and dashed in among the others.

Hal, Colonel Lutz and Stubbs were close behind him.

Now Stubbs, according to his own opinion of himself, was not a fighting man; yet he was performing deeds every moment now that would have added to the glory of many a soldier with the American army in France.

The little war correspondent had emptied his automatic long since and was now rushing upon the

enemy with revolver clubbed in his left hand, as were his companions. Stubbs' right fist was clenched tightly and it whirled about him like a flail.

"Kill 'em!" he yelled.

By this time the Germans had had opportunity of discovering that there were only four men who had attacked them. At a command from an officer they drew off.

Hal sensed instantly that this move spelled disaster.

"Keep close to 'em!" he shouted. "Let 'em draw off and they'll shoot us down!"

The others caught his meaning instantly.

Again the Americans hurled themselves forward in a desperate charge. They shouted defiance as they advanced. Much as Hal would liked to have taken time to reload his automatic for one more fusillade, he realized the foolishness of so much wasted time.

Finding that the Americans could not be shaken off and thus shot down at will, a German officer cried:

"You fools! Close in and kill them!"

Instantly, it seemed to Chester, a hundred men leaped upon him. Chester struck right and left with all his strength, as did the others, but the odds were too great against them. With a sinking heart, Hal realized that escape was impossible.

But at the very moment when it seemed that they must die in their tracks, the clear notes of a bugle split the air.

Instantly the tide of battle turned. The Germans seemed to lose heart for their task, and despite the commands of their officers, they fell back.

"Hurrah!" cried Hal, to whom the sounds of the bugle were unmistakable, "we are saved! Here come the Yanks."

It was, indeed, an American bugle that had rung out at the decisive moment.

At that instant, Colonel Lutz was engaged, single-handed, with three stalwart German soldiers. He parried the blows of two and struck one down with the butt of his revolver. But in doing this, he left his chest exposed to the third man. The latter lunged forward quickly with his bayonet, and Colonel Lutz dropped to the ground with a moan.

Hal sprang forward with a cry of horror as the German lunged, but he was too late. Nevertheless, he was in time to avenge the colonel, for before the German soldier could turn to run, the lad closed with him. His arm rose and fell twice in rapid succession. The German rolled to the ground.

Chester, meantime, had sprung forward and now held Colonel Lutz's head on his knee.

"Hurt much, colonel?" he asked.

"Done for, I guess," replied Colonel Lutz quietly.

"The bayonet went clear through me. Must have just missed my heart."

"You'll be all right, colonel," said Chester. "The Germans are retreating as fast as they can go. We'll have a surgeon for you in a jiffy. Here, Hal, lend a hand!"

Colonel Lutz shook his head.

"It's no use," he said. "I can feel it. I'm going fast. But there is one thing I want to say before I die. Gather closer, fellows."

With sad hearts, Hal, Chester and Stubbs obeyed.

"I want to caution you," said Colonel Lutz, "to give those papers you have to General Pershing in person. Only he knows of my mission and if they were placed in other hands, grave delay might result. Promise me."

"Of course, colonel," said Hal. "We shall follow your instructions."

"Good. As you know, that information, once in General Pershing's hands, will mean a great deal. It will give the Allied staff details of the enemy's strength and positions that can be put to decisive use. Well, I was afraid we couldn't all get through. It's just as well that it's I who fell."

"Don't talk like that, colonel," Chester protested. "You'll be all——"

"Don't try to fool me," said Colonel Lutz. "I am dying. I can scarcely speak. Good-bye, all."

His head fell back and a moment later he died. Chester laid him gently on the ground.

Came the sound of tramping feet. A column of khaki-clad figures darted toward them.

"Americans!" shouted Stubbs. "We're saved!"

CHAPTER XXV

A LITTLE HISTORY

THE great battle line on the Western front, when the grand American advance started on July 18, soon after the heroic fight by United States marines at Chateau Thierry, extended, roughly, from Nieuport, on the North Sea, south to Amiens, where it turned slightly eastward by south to Montron. From that point it bore off sharply to the east, and skirting the Argonne forest on the south, pushed on to Verdun, which was still in French hands.

From Verdun the line was stretched due south again along the river Meuse, but bore off eastward again just west of St. Mihiel, which was held by the Germans. Thence the line ran east into Alsace-Lorraine, almost to the German stronghold of Strassburg.

The region south and east of Verdun at this time was held almost exclusively by American troops, which depended for support to some extent, however, on French forces to the north and west. The

American strength on the fighting front was now practically two million men, composed of thirty-five combat divisions and six depot divisions.

In the American sectors, fighting had been of the severest nature ever since the Americans began driving the Germans back toward the Rhine on July 18. The German resistance had been stiff and the American losses heavy; but the enemy casualties had been considerably heavier than that of the Yankee troops.

Probably the fiercest of the fighting was in the Argonne forest, which now, on August 1, was virtually in the hands of the American forces.

Here the Germans had massed in greater force than at any place along the great battle line, and here the Americans had suffered their greatest losses. In more than one instance regiment after regiment, almost divisions, had been annihilated by German shells and terrific machine-gun fire.

Usually, in battles of such magnitude, the heaviest losses are inflicted upon the attacking forces; in fact, such has been the history of all wars up to this time. But American troops reversed the process in the battle of the Argonne forest, and the German losses, it was estimated after the engagement, were two to General Pershing's one.

It is probable that the battle for possession of the Argonne point, which was so hotly contested because of its strategic value to both armies, will go down in history as one of the greatest engage-

ments of all time; certainly the success of American arms there did more to break the back of German resistance than any other one feat in the world war, unless it was the victory of American marines at Chateau Thierry, which, however, was decisive more because of its moral effect than for any great advantage gained.

It was the indomitable will of the boys from America, their superb bravery and daring that carried them through the German lines and shattered the resistance of the enemy. In no battle or battles since the war began had such utter recklessness and disregard for danger or life been displayed.

The Germans could not understand it. To the German staff it must have appeared that the sacrifice was needless, but to the German soldiers it meant that the end had come. No longer would the offensive rest with the Teuton allies. Their last chance for victory had gone with the coming of the Americans more than a year before, but the enemy was just beginning to realize it.

In vain the German staff maneuvered its forces to halt the American advance. In vain they hurled the very best of their shock troops forward in reckless counter attacks. No longer did the German troops advance with the confidence they displayed in the early days of the war, when their quick advance almost took them to the gates of Paris.

Their morale had been broken by the steadiness of

the American defense. Now they hurled themselves forward as bravely as before in response to their officers' commands, but the confidence that makes for success was lacking. Mostly, they were whipped before the fighting began.

With this confidence gone, they had no chance with the American soldiers who had crossed the seas to help make the world safe for democracy. The word fail was not known to the boys in khaki. They were fighting for what they knew to be right, and it was this and their own courage that carried them through.

For days the battle of the Argonne forest had raged, but always the Americans had progressed steadily. True, they suffered minor reverses in various sections of the field at one time or another, but always they rushed in where they had been checked before—and they were not checked in the same place a second time.

Back of the American lines huge field hospitals had been erected. For the most part, these were portable structures, and they followed the troops as they advanced. Here, under the care of military surgeons and Red Cross doctors and nurses, the wounded men received the best of care. Red Cross workers penetrated almost to the front ranks to pass warm drinks and sandwiches to the soldiers. In no previous war had the soldiers been given the

same degree of attention as was made possible through the ministrations of the Red Cross.

It was on almost the last day of the battle for the Argonne forest that the Thirty-fifth American division, commanded by General Traub, suffered terrible losses at the hands of the Germans—that it was not annihilated was almost a miracle.

Ordered forward early in the morning to storm and hold a small hill at the edge of the forest, they had been promised support when needed. Bravely they charged into the very mouths of the German machine guns and heavier artillery. These engines of destruction cut great gaps in the ranks of the men from Yankee land, but they failed to stay their progress.

After an hour of fierce hand-to-hand fighting, in which the Germans who defended the hill were overpowered, the Americans found themselves masters of the situation. The enemy fled precipitately, but from the distance, batteries of great field guns were wheeled into position and a steady rain of shells poured upon the American troops.

The Yankees were not in sufficient strength to hold their present positions and to charge the German artillery; there was nothing for them to do but hold their ground until reinforcements arrived, at which time they could advance and capture or drive back the artillery that was handling them so roughly now.

These reinforcements failed to arrive. True, they had been promised, but through some misunderstanding of orders, not yet explained, the gallant Thirty-fifth was left to take care of itself.

There was no thought of retreat in the minds of the American officers. They had been ordered to storm, capture and hold the hill. They had stormed and captured it, and now they were holding it to the best of their ability; and they would continue to do it, German artillery or no, until they were overpowered or until assistance at last arrived.

The field at this point was covered with American dead. Men dropped on all sides, many to rise no more.

American batteries, mounted atop the hill, returned the German fire as well as they could, but they were badly outnumbered by the enemy's artillery, and one after another the American guns were silenced.

How long this situation could have endured there is no way of telling. More than two-thirds of the division had fallen now, but still the others fought on.

General Traub had made efforts to get into communication with General Pershing over the field telephones, but something was wrong with the wires. It was evident, of course, that the mistake of sending the Thirty-fifth forward unsupported eventually

would be seen, and reinforcements rushed up. But there was no telling how long this would take.

Despite the havoc reaped in the ranks, the men were smiling and cheerful as they bent to their tasks. They gave no sign of complaint. They gave the best that was in them, and that is all any man can do.

Meantime, at American staff headquarters, the plight of the Thirty-fifth was learned. Instantly preparations were rushed to reinforce it and save the unit before it was utterly annihilated.

Fresh divisions, which were arriving frequently from other sectors of the American line, were brought into action. Major-General Joseph E. Kuhn, in command of the Seventy-ninth division, was ordered to the support of the Thirty-fifth.

The men that composed this regiment were from western Pennsylvania, Maryland and the District of Columbia. They went forward with wild cheers.

It was early the following morning when the Seventy-ninth burst through the woods and appeared to their harrassed comrades of the Thirty-fifth atop the hill. From farther back, American artillery sent a heavy barrage.

The Seventy-ninth charged.

Officers of the Thirty-fifth held their men in leash long enough to permit a realignment of their lines, and then they went pell mell after the Seventy-ninth.

What a surprise it was to the Germans.

The German general staff knew as well as though it had been atop the hill that the Thirty-fifth American division was all but annihilated. It did not seem to German officers as though there could be left in these men enough spirit to advance.

For more than twenty-four hours they had withstood the German fire, and now the handful that was left was advancing in a charge. It was more than the German mind could comprehend.

After a few moments of futile resistance, the German line broke. Again the fighting became hand-to-hand. At this sort of struggle, the enemy soldiers were no match for the Yankees, and the result soon became apparent.

The German troops retired, slowly at first, then faster and faster. The retreat became a rout.

So came the Americans into the possession of the Argonne forest, after long, weary days of strenuous and desperate fighting.

Hal and Chester, though in the Argonne forest while this battling was in progress, had been prevented from taking active part in the fighting for reasons that we have already seen.

It was with relief that both lads, sad though they were at the death of Colonel Lutz, beheld the advance of American troops, coming to their aid.

"Now," said Chester, "we'll have to make all possible haste to General Pershing's headquarters and

give him the information Colonel Lutz entrusted to us."

"Right," agreed Hal; "and the sooner we get moving the better."

CHAPTER XXVI

GENERAL PERSHING ACTS

So Hal and Chester came again to General Pershing.

The American commander-in-chief was alone in his private study in his large headquarters in the city of Rheims when the lads' names were brought to him. He was very tired, for he had but recently returned from a quick trip to the front, and he had been on the point of retiring for the night.

General Pershing recalled instantly the names of Captains Paine and Crawford, and from his knowledge of them he knew they would not disturb him at this hour—it was almost midnight—had they not good and sufficient reason. Consequently, he ordered that they be conducted into his presence at once.

When rescued by American soldiers in the Argonne forest, the lads at once had confided to the commander of the regiment the fact that they were the bearer of documents that must be delivered immediately to the commander-in-chief. The latter

had placed a high-powered automobile at their disposal and they had made the trip in record time.

General Pershing was standing, facing the door, when Hal and Chester entered the room, saluted and drew themselves to attention.

"Glad to see you again," was General Pershing's terse comment. "What can I do for you?"

"We have important information, sir," replied Hal quietly, and without further words passed over the paper Colonel Lutz had given him in the German lines earlier in the day.

General Pershing scanned the paper closely; then, drawing a chair up to his desk, he sat down and perused the document again. At last he looked up.

"How did you come by this?" he asked sharply.

"It was given to me by Colonel Lutz, sir," replied Hal.

Instantly General Pershing was on his feet.

"Lutz!" he exclaimed. "Where is he?"

"Dead, sir," was Hal's quiet response.

"Dead!" ejaculated the American commander.

"Yes, sir; killed by a German bayonet in the Argonne forest, sir."

"Explain," said General Pershing briefly.

Hal did so; and when he concluded the account of their adventures by describing the death of Colonel Lutz, General Pershing for some moments was lost in thought.

But this inactivity did not last long. He tapped

a bell on his desk. An orderly entered and saluted.

"Get me Marshal Foch's headquarters on the phone," was General Pershing's command. "Say that I have business of importance. Hurry!"

The orderly saluted and departed. General Pershing sat back in his chair, close to his desk telephone, and spoke to Hal and Chester.

"Colonel Lutz was a brave man," he said. "And so he has died for his adopted country!"

"But not in vain, sir," Chester ventured.

"No," said General Pershing; "as you say, not in vain. He has accomplished a remarkable piece of work. I shall see that he is cited for this."

The telephone bell rang sharply. General Pershing seized the receiver and put it to his ear.

"Hello!" he said. "This is General Pershing. Please inform Marshal Foch that I desire a word with him at once." There was silence for a few moments and then General Pershing continued: "Your excellency? This is Pershing. I have important information, marshal, that has just come to me. It is vital and I am afraid to trust it to the wire. Where may I see you early to-morrow?"

The lads could not make out Marshal Foch's reply, but it seemed to please General Pershing.

"All right," he said. "I shall await you here at eight o'clock in the morning. Good-bye, sir!"

He replaced the receiver on the hook and turned to Hal and Chester.

"Marshal Foch will be here in the morning," he said. "I shall desire your presence then. I shall find quarters here for you to-night." He tapped the bell. The orderly entered again. "Find quarters for Captain Paine and Captain Crawford," instructed General Pershing, "and see that they are aroused in the morning so they may report to me here at eight o'clock."

"Very well, sir," said the orderly, saluting. He turned to Hal and Chester. "Will you follow me?" he suggested.

First the lads saluted their commander, then followed the orderly. At the door, they turned and saluted. General Pershing returned the formality.

"Good night, sirs," he said.

Ten minutes later Hal and Chester found themselves installed in a comfortable room on the second floor of the house where slept General Pershing himself.

"We seem to have stirred up something, Chester," said Hal.

"Rather," was Chester's response. "We'll know just what in the morning. Well, I'm tired. Me for a little sleep."

"Same here. Say! I'll bet Stubbs would give his ears to be present at to-morrow's conference."

"He'd probably give his head," was Chester's reply. "Too bad he decided not to come along. Well, good night."

"Good night," repeated Hal, throwing himself into bed. "Don't forget to get up in the morning."

"Don't forget yourself," were Chester's last words before sleep claimed him.

It seemed to both lads that they had scarcely closed their eyes when they were awakened by a pounding on the door.

"Hello!" cried Chester, sitting up. "What's the matter?"

"Seven o'clock," came the reply. "Turn out, sir."

"By Jove! I must have slept like a top," muttered Chester. "Seems like I'd just turned in. Roll out, Hal."

Hal mumbled sleepily and it took Chester several minutes to convince him that it really was time to get up.

"I'd like to stay about eight hours longer," he said, looking regretfully at his bed.

"Never mind," said Chester. "A little cold water will fix you up all right. After that a cup of coffee and a bite to eat, and we'll be good for a week or so."

It took them but a few moments to don what few clothes they had removed, and half past seven found them leaving the room. In the hall they were accosted by an orderly, who halted them.

"Come with me," he said. "I am instructed to conduct you to your breakfasts."

"That sounds good," declared Chester. "It seems that we are to get more than coffee."

"I'm glad of that. I'm almost famished."

The boys felt considerably better after they had disposed of a hot cup of coffee apiece and had devoured a couple of eggs each and half a dozen pieces of toast.

"Now, that's a meal fit for a king," declared Hal, pushing back his chair.

"Or a general," grinned Chester.

"I stand corrected. Or a general, then."

Chester glanced at his watch.

"Five minutes to eight," he said. "Time to be on our way."

At the door of the breakfast room they were again accosted by the orderly, who informed them that he had been ordered to conduct them to the commander-in-chief.

"Lead the way," said Hal.

They were admitted at once to General Pershing's study. General Pershing, as usual, already was at work. A huge pile of documents lay before him. These he had been studying when the lads entered.

"Marshal Foch has not arrived as yet," said General Pershing, "but I expect him momentarily. Be seated."

Thus adjured, the lads sat down, while their

commander again buried himself in the mass of papers.

Ten minutes later there was a knock on the door, and an orderly looked in to announce:

"His excellency, Marshal Foch."

General Pershing got to his feet and faced the door. So did Hal and Chester, standing stiffly at attention. A moment later Marshal Foch stepped into the room, alone, and advanced with extended hand, which General Pershing grasped warmly.

"I'm sorry I'm late, general," said Marshal Foch, "but it was unavoidable. I met with an accident en route."

"Say no more about it, your excellency," replied General Pershing. "Have you brought your staff?"

"Yes, sir; but I left them without, thinking perhaps you might have something to confide to me alone."

"It is just as well, your excellency. By the way, you know these young officers?"

He indicated Hal and Chester, who stood stiffly at attention.

Marshal Foch surveyed them keenly. Then he smiled.

"I seldom forget a face, or a name," he said. "If I am not mistaken, these are Captains Paine and Crawford, the officers whom you sent into the heart of Germany for a certain bit of information?"

"The same, your excellency," returned General Pershing. "Now they are the bearers of other and equally important information."

"So? They seem to have a happy faculty of being in the right place at the right time. I am glad to see you again, sirs," and he bowed slightly to the two lads.

"Thank you, sir," said Hal and Chester in a single voice.

Marshal Foch turned again to General Pershing.

"Now, general," he said, "I shall be glad to hear you; and I trust you will be brief, for I have other pressing matters to attend to to-day. But I knew by your voice over the phone last night that what you have to say is of pressing importance."

"It is, your excellency," said General Pershing. "In brief, I have here before me," and he tapped the bit of paper Hal had given him the night before, "the exact disposition of all the German armies on the Western battle front; their numbers, plans of campaign and other details."

Marshal Foch slapped his thigh.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he said, his face flushing with pleasure; "but that is good! You have surpassed my fondest hopes. Let me see, general!"

CHAPTER XXVII

MARSHAL FOCH DECIDES

GENERAL PERSHING passed the bit of paper to Marshal Foch. The latter sank into a chair near the American commander's desk and scanned the document carefully.

At last he looked up, and there was a smile on his face.

"This," he said, and he tapped the paper significantly, "is the one thing that I have wanted above all else. Are you sure it is authentic?"

"Absolutely, your excellency," returned General Pershing. "Here are the officers who brought it. You may question them yourself, if you desire."

"It will be well," said the commander-in-chief of all the Allied forces to himself. He turned to Hal and Chester. "Will you explain to me," he requested, "just how you came into possession of these facts?"

Chester explained briefly how they had met Colonel Lutz while prisoners among the Germans; how the latter had revealed his true identity and given them duplicate sets of figures, thus guarding against the possibility of failure should one or more of them be killed.

At the conclusion of Chester's narrative, Marshal Foch asked of General Pershing:

"Are you sure, general, of the loyalty of this Colonel Lutz—this man born a German, but who died an American?"

"I am, sir," returned General Pershing. "He was one of my most invaluable aides. Besides, his death has proved his loyalty."

"True," muttered Marshal Foch. "That point had escaped me. But another question." He turned again to Chester. "Are you sure," he asked, "that Colonel Lutz was not suspected by the Germans?"

"Positive, sir," replied the lad. "The only man who had occasion to suspect him lies dead in the Argonne forest, sir. The others were certain he was what he represented himself to be—Captain Hans Lutz, of the German army, his brother, sir."

"It is well," said Marshal Foch, after a moment of deep thought. "There can be no room for doubt."

"I agree with your excellency," said General Pershing, "and that is why I wish to urge immediate action."

Marshal Foch smiled grimly into his mustache.

"As impetuous as ever, my friend, eh?" he said. "And what would you suggest?"

General Pershing led the way across the room to a large table. On this was spread a map of huge

dimensions. Without hesitation, General Pershing laid his forefinger on a certain point on the map.

"Here, your excellency," he said quietly, "is the crux of the situation."

Marshal Foch gazed over General Pershing's shoulder.

"Hm-m-m," he muttered. "St. Mihiel, eh?"

"Exactly, sir."

The French commander-in-chief laid a hand on General Pershing's shoulder.

"It must be," he said quietly, "that we are good soldiers after all. I, myself, have decided that that is the one point necessary for final victory."

General Pershing's face, usually grim, expressed his pleasure.

"I am glad, your excellency," he said simply.

Both men were silent for long moments now, gazing closely at the map. General Pershing broke the silence.

"Yes," he said at last, "I am sure that that is the point. With the Argonne in our possession now, together with the east shore of the Meuse, a decisive blow in the St. Mihiel sector will prove the finishing touch."

"Exactly, general," said Marshal Foch, "if successful."

"It will be successful, sir," declared General Pershing. "Trust my men for that, sir."

"You mean," said Marshal Foch "that you wish this task for the American forces?"

General Pershing inclined his head.

"I do, sir," he replied quietly.

"I had thought," said Marshal Foch after a moment's hesitation, "of transferring several divisions of my own troops, or possibly of the British, to lend the Americans necessary assistance when time came for the stroke at St. Mihiel."

"We can go through without it, sir," declared General Pershing.

"Well," said Marshal Foch, smiling slightly, "at least you have past accomplishments to back up your claim. But I want to say this. When the St. Mihiel blow is delivered, it must be carried to a successful conclusion without delay. The enemy must be smashed there so suddenly that he will not know what hit him."

"And how long will you give me for that task, your excellency?" asked General Pershing eagerly.

Again the French commander smiled.

"You seem certain I shall entrust the Americans with the task," he said quietly; and then added sharply: "Ten days."

General Pershing looked squarely at Marshal Foch.

"I shall do it in less, your excellency," he said simply.

Marshal Foch gazed at the American commander-in-chief with some consternation.

"What!" he exclaimed. "You accept on those terms?"

"Of course, sir."

"But," said Marshal Foch, "I only half meant what I said. I can spare fifteen or twenty days for the task and still carry out my plans, although the sooner it is done the better."

"I shall do it in four days, or sooner, your excellency," declared General Pershing.

"But, man, it can't be done!"

"It will be done, your excellency!"

"Have you a plan?"

"Yes; though it is not perfected. But the main feature of that plan hangs absolutely upon my confidence that when my men start for the enemy again, they will not stop until they have crushed him."

"All very well," said Marshal Foch. "I'm sure that French and British both had the same spirit in the early days of the war."

"And I've no doubt they would have beaten the foe then had they gone through with their plans," declared General Pershing. "Too great caution, to my mind, is what permitted the second German offensive."

"It may be," admitted Marshal Foch. "I can't dispute you, but at the same time, I can't warn you

too strongly against necessary caution in the present venture."

"Have no fear, your excellency," said General Pershing. "I give you my absolute assurance that the enemy will be driven from St. Mihiel within four days."

"Then I accept your offer!" declared Marshal Foch. "To the Americans shall go the honor of delivering the blow that will crush the Germans in the end, even as to the Americans will go, in history, the credit of saving Europe from the hands of the spoiler."

"I thank you, your excellency."

"There is nothing further, then?" said Marshal Foch.

"Not unless you have instructions for me, sir."

"I have none. You shall use your own judgment. Already I have found it to be good. I shall bid you *au revoir*, general."

He extended a hand, which General Pershing grasped warmly. Marshal Foch moved toward the door. At the threshold, he stopped for a final word with Hal and Chester.

"You have done well, young sirs," he said. "America should be proud of you. You are captains, I see. Well, my word for it, you'll be colonels or better before long."

The lads saluted.

"Thank you, your excellency," they said in one breath.

A moment later Marshal Foch was gone.

While the two lads still stood at attention, General Pershing went hurriedly to his desk.

"One moment," he called to Hal and Chester.

He scribbled furiously for some minutes. Then, turning, he motioned the lads to approach.

"There is work to be done and done quickly," said the American commander-in-chief. "Here," he extended a document to Hal. "Take this first to General Traub; then to Generals Smith and Farnsworth. Then report back to me." He passed a similar document to Chester. "You will take this to General Haan and Generals Lewis and Hay," he instructed, "and then also will report back to me. Other divisional commanders will receive their instructions through other couriers. I dare not trust such matters to the telephone. Now hurry!"

The lads saluted their commander once more, wheeled on their heels and took their departure.

"Automobile, Hal?" asked Chester as they hurried out.

Hal shook his head.

"Too slow!" he replied.

"What then?"

"Motorcycles, if we can get 'em!"

Outside they came upon the orderly who a short

time before had conducted them to General Pershing's presence. Hal accosted him.

"We've important dispatches to carry for General Pershing," he said. "We want a couple of motorcycles, at once. Can you help us?"

The other's reply was brief.

"Follow me," he said. "I'll see."

Fortunately for the two lads, the orderly was able to supply their wants without delay, and ten minutes later found them on the road.

"We'll ride together as far as Verdun," Hal said. "I'll branch off there for General Smith's headquarters at Noyers first."

"Right," said Chester. "My first stop will be at the headquarters of General Lewis. He's at St. Dizier, rather out of the way, if you ask me, but I suppose he'll attack from the south."

"We don't need to do any guessing," said Hal. "All we've got to do is to deliver these dispatches as quickly as possible. I'm going to see if I can get a little speed out of this thing."

"Help yourself," said Chester. "I'll be right with you."

The big army motorcycles leaped forward. A moment and the lads were skimming eastward at the rate of sixty miles an hour!

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE ZERO HOUR

HALF a million men is the force that General John J. Pershing, commander-in-chief of the American army in France, hurled upon the Germans in the St. Mihiel sector. Numerically the opposing forces were upon an almost equal basis when the fighting began, but the morale and spirit of the Yankee troops were so much more perfect than that of the enemy that the outcome was never in doubt after the initial advance.

True, the Germans resisted bitterly, to the best of their ability. Reinforcements were rushed from other sectors to bolster the faltering lines before St. Mihiel, but to no purpose.

It was six o'clock in the evening when Hal, carrying dispatches from General Pershing, dismounted from his motorcycle before the headquarters of General Smith, commander of the Thirty-sixth division. General Smith read the paper Hal passed him quickly.

"You may inform General Pershing that his commands will be carried out to the letter," said General Smith.

A moment later Hal was again in the saddle, hurrying to the headquarters of General Farnsworth,

commander of the Thirty-seventh. This officer gave Hal a message to carry back to General Pershing almost identical with that of General Smith. Then Hal repaired to the headquarters of General Traub, of the Thirty-fifth Division—the division that had given such a heroic account of itself in the Argonne forest. This unit had been sadly decimated in the forest fighting, but General Traub announced that he would act in accordance with General Pershing's instructions with what men he had left.

His work thus accomplished, Hal started on his return journey to General Pershing's headquarters in Rheims.

Chester also had made excellent time on his mission and in each case had received assurances that General Pershing's plans would be carried out.

Hal reached Rheims again shortly after daylight. Chester returned an hour later. Both lads reported to General Pershing at eight o'clock.

General Pershing heard their reports in silence. After a minute he said:

"You have been prompt. If all goes well, and I have no reason to doubt that it will, we will open our attack to-morrow morning at six o'clock. Four days from that date I have promised Marshal Foch that we will have wiped out the German St. Mihiel salient. It must be done."

"I am sure it will be done, sir," Hal ventured.

"I've not the slightest doubt of it," declared the

lad's commander. "I know what American troops can do, none better. While you young men have carried dispatches to several points, other couriers have visited other divisional commanders. It is my plan to have the attack launched from three sides simultaneously. Once the attack has begun, there must be no faltering—no holding back—until St. Mihiel is in American hands. But there is still time for rest, and I know you must both be tired out. You may turn in now, but report to me again at six o'clock to-night. That is all, sirs."

The lads saluted and left the room. As General Pershing had said, they were tired, indeed, and realizing that there would be work a-plenty to do the following day, they took their commander's advice and turned in.

Both were up at five o'clock, however, and six found them again in the presence of their commander-in-chief. General Pershing greeted their entrance with a nod, then fell to poring over a pile of maps and charts heaped on his desk. The lads, meanwhile, stood at attention at the far side of the room.

From time to time other officers entered and stood silently awaiting a sign from General Pershing that would send them on various errands. These were the members of the general's personal staff, and Hal and Chester could not help feeling honored to be among them.

Suddenly General Pershing wheeled about.

"Colonel Gibson!" he called.

A young officer stepped forward and saluted.

"Get in touch by telephone with the divisional commanders and order a heavy barrage opened at four in the morning—this to cover an infantry advance at six."

Colonel Gibson saluted and left the room hurriedly.

Again General Pershing pored over his maps. Ten minutes later he looked up and called sharply:

"Colonel Longworth!"

Another young officer stepped forward and saluted.

"Inform General Traub I must be kept in instant touch with reports of activity behind the enemy lines brought in by his air scouts."

Colonel Longworth left the room.

"Captain Paine!"

Hal stepped forward and saluted his commander stiffly.

"My compliments to General Lewis. Order him to advance in force and invest Conde and be ready to cross the Meuse to the south of St. Mihiel at the zero hour to-morrow morning. You will then place yourself at his disposal."

"Yes, sir!"

Hal saluted and hurried out.

"Captain Crawford!"

Chester approached his commander and stood at attention.

"Inform General Smith I shall depend upon him to storm and carry the heights to the north of St. Mihiel in the first attack to-morrow morning at six o'clock. Tell him he will be supported by General Farnsworth. You will remain with General Smith until after the battle."

"Yes, sir!"

Chester saluted stiffly, turned sharply on his heel and strode quickly from the room after Hal.

The latter was just mounting his motorcycle again when Chester came up.

"Wait!" cried Chester. "I'll go with you again almost to Verdun."

A moment later Chester also was mounted and the two lads sped away in the darkness.

Because of the fact that the road was dark ahead, they were not able to make as great speed as they had done on their previous journey. For this reason, as they rode rather close together, they were able to converse.

"I'll have to get a move on," declared Hal. "If General Lewis is to invest Conde before morning, it will require swift work."

"Nevertheless, it won't be such a big job, I guess," declared Chester. "The Germans probably will fall back without great resistance. In the darkness, their air scouts will hardly be able to tell whether the

move is a feint or an attack in force. They'll probably play it safe and retire on St. Mihiel."

"Perhaps," said Hal. "At the same time, the sooner General Lewis gets his instructions, the more time he'll have."

"That's plain enough," declared Chester.

"Then let's see if we can't get a little more speed out of these things," said Hal.

"You're liable to break your neck," declared Chester.

"Can't be helped," replied Hal. "Here I go!"

"Well, I'll go along," said Chester.

The speed of the two motorcycles increased. Hal and Chester, leaning forward as far as they could, kept their eyes peeled for objects ahead, and their hands ready to guide their machines to one side or other of the road at the slightest warning.

It was risky business, this racing along a dark and unfamiliar road at fifty or sixty miles an hour. The lads took their lives in their hands. From time to time they caught sight of an object ahead quick enough to veer sharply to one side and pass it safely. Occasionally lights flashed by.

True, the searchlights on the powerful motorcycles lighted up the road for some distance ahead, but it could not tell the riders of what dangers might lie in wait around the sharp curves which seemed only a few rods apart, so swiftly did the machines cover the ground.

Hal, slightly in advance, was not aware when Chester slowed down his own motorcycle at a point where a branch road gave him a short cut to the headquarters of General Smith of the Thirty-sixth division.

Chester shouted a farewell to his chum, but the latter did not hear it.

"He's too deuced anxious to reach General Lewis to bother about me," Chester told himself with a grin. "Well, he's right; and the more speed I can get out of my own steed, the quicker General Smith will get his instructions."

He increased the speed of his machine.

"Wonder how long before I'll see Hal again?" the lad muttered.

He was to see him sooner than he expected and under circumstances that called for prompt action on Chester's part.

Hal reached his destination without incident and gave General Pershing's commands to General Lewis.

Instantly all became activity in that section of the field where the Thirty-first division was encamped. Aides rushed hither and thither with orders. The camp sprang to arms as if by magic.

The troops sprang to their places as a single man. Artillery and cavalry wheeled into position. Tanks took their places in the line. Half an hour later the advance on Conde began.

As Chester had predicted, the Germans offered very feeble resistance to the advance of the Americans on Conde. The village was attacked in force soon after midnight, and before two o'clock in the morning the Americans were in possession of the former enemy positions.

Instantly General Lewis gave instructions for consolidating the newly-won positions and made preparations for a renewal of the advance in the morning, when he would send his men forward simultaneously with other American divisions at the zero hour—six o'clock.

For the information of the young readers who may not know the exact meaning of the words "zero hour," it may be said that the hour set for an advance, or "to go over the top," had been referred to since the early days of the war as the "zero hour." In this case the zero hour was six o'clock, for that was the moment when American troops would go forward to the attack.

The night passed quietly, save for the voices of the big guns in the opposing armies. But at four o'clock there was a sudden burst of artillery fire from the big batteries in the American ranks. This was the barrage ordered by General Pershing for the protection of the infantry attack, and it would continue until the troops went "over the top."

Five minutes before six o'clock the American

army was ready for the signal to advance. And it came soon. The zero hour had arrived!

CHAPTER XXIX

THE ADVANCE

It was broad daylight when the American armies sprang forward to the attack.

Gradually the heavy barrage, which protected the advance of the infantry, was lessened as the infantry neared the first-line German trenches before St. Mihiel. The voices of the American guns did not become silent, but the hail of shells which had been thrown into the field before the enemy trenches to keep the Germans in their cover, now began to fall farther back in the enemy lines.

The battle for St. Mihiel had opened as had most battles of the war, and for this reason the Germans were aware long before the American advance that there was something in the air. The heavy barrage laid down before the zero hour had aroused the sleeping German troops, and their officers, reading the signs aright, knew that the Americans were coming after them.

Hastily the German general staff strengthened its lines wherever possible. Despite the fact that they were on the defensive and, by all lines of reasoning, should have the advantage, the German officers were

too well aware of the fighting qualities of the men from Yankeeland to overlook any point that would make them secure against the impending attack.

Consequently, when the first American troops drew closer to the first-line German trenches, the enemy, instead of waiting for the Americans to come to them, leaped to their feet, jumped from their trenches and charged the Americans in the open.

For a moment the Americans were stunned by this unexpected action. They had expected the enemy to remain in his shelter as long as he could, and they had advanced with the belief that their work would be to dislodge the foe from his refuge and clear the trenches and not themselves be forced to assume the defensive.

But the effect of the German surprise lasted but a few moments. With wild cheers the Americans, in perfect formation, threw themselves forward with the desperate courage characteristic of their service. The oncoming waves broke against the impenetrable Yankee front as though it had been a rock. In vain were their efforts to find an opening through which they might dash and split the American forces.

The impetus of the charge was soon lost. The German line wavered, halted and then retired.

Then the Americans sprang forward after them. Faster and faster ran the enemy, the Yankees gaining at every stride. Thus hard-pressed, the enemy

faced either utter annihilation or the alternative of turning and giving battle. They chose the latter.

Bayonet crashed against bayonet; revolvers were brought into play; rifles were clubbed by the Americans, now that the action was so close as to preclude sighting and firing. In the heat of the conflict, some of the Americans,—mountaineers from West Virginia and lumbermen from the northwest—almost giants in stature—threw away their weapons altogether and went for the Germans with their naked fists.

There could be no doubt as to the outcome of this mêlée. Groups of the enemy now began to drop their weapons and raise their hands above their heads. Cries of "Kamerad" were heard in many parts of the field.

As these batches of Germans surrendered, they were taken in charge by the men in the front lines and passed back to the rear; then the troops continued to forge ahead.

To the west of St. Mihiel, where the heroic Thirty-fifth, the Thirty-second and the Thirty-first divisions were engaged, the fighting was of the fiercest. The Seventy-ninth, the Forty-second and the Thirty-ninth swept down from the north, while the Twenty-ninth, the Twenty-eighth and the Third, the latter a division of regular army troops, darted forward from the southwest.

A dozen or more other divisions were being held

in reserve, while at the American concentration camp south of St. Dizier, still other divisions were hastily being put in battle formation, ready to rush forward should the need become acute.

The first-line German trenches due west of St. Mihiel had been carried in less than an hour of fighting, and now the Americans eagerly swept forward to dispossess the enemy from his second line.

Here the Germans put up a stiffer resistance, however. This time the general staff did not make the mistake of ordering a charge to stem the Americans. The enemy waited quietly until the Americans were only a few yards from the trenches, and then poured in a veritable hail of rifle and machine-gun fire.

The foremost American troops went down like chaff before the wind; but the ranks were quickly reformed and the Yankees continued their advance, in open formation, the better to avoid the hurricane of fire that swept over them.

To the north the American advance was meeting with greater success. The first-line trenches in that section of the field had been carried with ease, and after half an hour of additional fighting, the attackers found themselves masters of the enemy's second-line defenses.

For the first time, it now appeared, the German general staff realized that with their present strength they could not throw back the Americans. Hurry

calls for reinforcements were flashed to other sectors, and soon troop trains began to move toward St. Mihiel.

But the Americans, with victory within their grasp, were not to be denied. They went forward with greater confidence than before.

Darkness fell and still the fighting continued.

Apparently the Germans had figured the American attack would slow down with the coming of darkness, but rather it seemed to grow in ferocity. At eight o'clock the enemy had been driven from his third-line trenches on all sides of St. Mihiel and the Americans showed no signs of slowing down.

In vain the German officers tried to rally their men to their tasks. It seemed that the German troops had become convinced they could not stem the tide, and they fought now more like the mechanical machine they were than with any thought of victory.

Shortly before midnight, the Germans launched a counter attack to the south of the city. This the Americans put down with ease and with great loss to the enemy in killed and wounded. Also, thousands of prisoners fell into the hands of the Yankees.

At midnight, the fighting died down somewhat. Apparently, the American commanders had decided to rest on their laurels for the remainder of the

night, but the enemy knew that the attack would be resumed early in the morning.

From behind the German lines, the great field guns hurled death and destruction into the American ranks; but the Yankee soldiers, tired out after their strenuous work, slept where they were utterly unconscious of the high explosive shells that screamed overhead, and fell in among and all around them from time to time.

German officers took advantage of the lull in the fighting to strengthen their positions against the hour of the renewed American advance in the morning and in an effort to instill fresh spirit and courage into the hearts of their men.

Reinforcements were arriving hourly. These fresh troops immediately were rushed to replace their tired comrades at the front, while the latter were taken back to act as reserve units.

This plan was not followed to such a great extent among the American forces. The men who had pressed forward first during the day's fighting, were ready and eager to be the first at the enemy again the following day. Only in cases where companies and regiments had been so greatly cut up as to make a realignment necessary were reserve troops thrown in.

During the night, apparently in an effort to make the Americans believe that they would take the offensive when daylight came, several German raids were

launched at various points along the line. American troops were aroused from their sleep to repel these forces, after which the tired soldiers fell in their tracks to rest again.

In the headquarters of General Lewis, of the Thirty-first American Division, other divisional commanders were in conference. They had been rushed to this section of the field by high-powered army automobiles. There they discussed plans for the following day.

Came a telephone call from General Pershing. General Lewis answered it in person.

"It has been a glorious day for American arms," came General Pershing's voice. "Your country has reason to be proud of you all. I want you to know that every division in yesterday's fighting shall be cited for bravery; every man deserves it."

General Pershing then gave some few instructions to be followed when the battle was resumed in the morning.

"Gentlemen," said General Lewis, after General Pershing had rung off and after he had repeated the commander-in-chief's words to the others, "we all know that General Pershing has assured Marshal Foch we shall be in possession of St. Mihiel in four days."

"Yes, yes," came the voices of the others.

"Well, I say," continued General Lewis, "that St.

Mihiel shall be in our possession in less than two days!"

"Good!" cried General Farnsworth.

"We shall march into St. Mihiel before night!" declared General Traub.

"St. Mihiel will have fallen within twenty-four hours more," exclaimed General Smith.

"In that event, sirs," said General Haan, "I believe that it would be wise for us all to return to our posts immediately. Time grows short." He glanced at his watch. "It is now two o'clock. The advance on St. Mihiel is a trifle more than twenty hours old. With good fortune, it will be over in ten hours more."

The conference broke up. General Lewis, despite the lateness of the hour and the fact that he had been without sleep for almost two days, did not retire, as he might have been expected to do. Instead, he fell to poring over a mass of maps and other documents. Then he summoned an orderly.

"My compliments to Captain Paine," he said, "and have him report to me at once."

Five minutes later Hal stood before him.

"Here, captain," said General Lewis, passing the lad a paper. "I wish this delivered to General Brown before daylight."

Hal took the paper, stuffed it in his pocket, saluted and left the general's tent.

CHAPTER XXX

IN THIRTY HOURS

"Six o'clock."

It was Chester who spoke. He had just left the headquarters of General Smith and was headed for the front American lines with dispatches for Colonel Greene, who commanded the Twenty-sixth regiment.

It had now been just twenty-four hours since the American advance on St. Mihiel had begun. Chester, during most of the previous day, had been busy carrying dispatches to various parts of the field held by the Thirty-sixth division. It had been late at night before he found a breathing space, and still he had found no time for sleep.

"Wonder what Hal is doing?" the lad muttered, as he urged his motorcycle forward.

The same thought was in Hal's mind as he made his way toward the headquarters of General Brown, of the Third division, to the south of St. Mihiel.

"Hope Chester has come to no harm," he muttered as he sped along.

It was still dark and the road that Hal traversed was bad. Consequently he was forced to go rather slowly. He was unfamiliar with this section of the field and from time to time found it necessary to

ask directions from officers or soldiers he passed along the way.

"I should be there in an hour now," he told himself some time later, after having gained his bearings from an American lieutenant he had just come upon.

As it developed, however, Hal was not to reach the headquarters of General Brown at all that night, nor that day.

Unconsciously, the lad took the wrong fork in the road and before he knew it was riding directly toward the German lines. He had now passed the farthest advanced American outpost, and though he did not know it at that moment, he was lost.

Half an hour later he became uneasy.

"Something tells me I'm going the wrong way," he muttered.

He stopped his motorcycle and dismounted. In the darkness he could not gain his bearings. He struck a match.

As he did so, footsteps came toward him. Hal breathed a sigh of relief.

"I'll ask this fellow to set me right," he said.

"Who goes there?" came a voice in German.

Hal staggered back.

"Great Scott!" he muttered. "I've come into the German lines!"

The lad thought quickly. He could mount his

motorcycle, turn and dash away, or he could run. He discarded both these plans, however for he knew the German had seen him, and should he make a move that would betray him as an American, the German undoubtedly would shoot and ask questions afterward. Therefore he replied in German.

"A friend," he said.

"Advance, friend, and give the countersign," said the German soldier.

Hal advanced slowly, his revolver barrel gripped in his right hand.

The German peered at him through the darkness, his rifle half raised.

Suddenly the man gave a harsh cry, and raised his rifle. But before he could press the trigger, Hal was upon him. The lad's arm rose and fell sharply. There was a crunch as the butt struck the German's head. The man dropped like a log.

"So much for you," muttered Hal. "Now to get away from here."

He hurried to his motorcycle, which he had allowed to fall in the road when accosted by the German, but before he could pick it up his ear caught the sound of other footsteps coming toward him.

"Great Scott! I seem to have run into a nest of them," he said.

Quickly he picked up his motorcycle and would have mounted. There was a shot, and a sharp ex-

plosion almost in Hal's ears. The lad's heart sank, for he knew what that sound meant.

"The lucky dogs!" he mumbled. "They've punctured my tire. Well, it's up to me to make myself scarce."

There was a volley of shots and Hal heard bullets whine past his ear. He dropped his motorcycle and took to his heels and directly found refuge in a clump of bushes.

"They'll probably find me," he muttered, "but they'll hear from me before they get me. I'll promise 'em that."

He held a revolver in each hand.

The lad could hear the voices of the men as they stooped over their fallen companion, but he could not make out what they said. Every moment, however, he expected them to come toward him.

How long Hal stayed there he did not know, but soon it began to grow light. Hal glanced at his watch.

It was almost five o'clock.

Peering from his hiding place, Hal saw that the Germans had taken their posts only a short distance away. It would be impossible for the lad to elude them by a quick dash.

"Well, I'll have to stay here till they find me," he said.

He made himself as comfortable as possible and became quiet.

Suddenly the roar of battle, that had been stilled since midnight, broke out afresh.

"By George! This is tough," declared Hal. "There goes the fighting again and here I am marooned. I might as well be on a desert island for all the good I'm doing. Well, this dispatch for General Brown is no good now, I guess; but I can't help it. I hope it wasn't very important."

The Germans ahead of Hal grew active. They were reinforced by others and soon they moved directly toward Hal's hiding place. The lad made himself as small as possible. He crouched down, his revolvers ready for instant use.

But the Germans passed his hiding place without a glance, and soon disappeared beyond. For a moment Hal was undecided what to do. He was between two fires, and whichever way he went he knew he was likely to encounter a force of the enemy. He decided to lie still.

An hour later, firing grew closer in Hal's rear. Soon the Germans who had so recently passed him reappeared, but they were returning at a faster pace than they had advanced. Hal exulted, for he felt sure he knew the reason. They were being pursued by Americans.

In this the lad was right.

As the Germans came to the clump of bushes where Hal hid, one of them peered in. Instantly

Hal knew that he was discovered. His revolver cracked, and the man fell back.

The other Germans dashed toward the bushes. Hal's revolver spoke rapidly. At that distance a miss was impossible, and three others of the enemy fell. Others returned the lad's fire, and Hal felt a sting in his left arm.

The Germans now surrounded the bushes.

"Come out!" called one.

"Not much!" replied Hal grimly, and fired again.

The Germans consulted.

"Rush him!" said one.

The Germans acted on this plan. They advanced rapidly.

Hal's plight was serious and he knew it. Nevertheless, he determined to fight it out.

But aid came to the lad unexpectedly. Behind him, a company of men in khaki appeared suddenly. The Germans perceived them, uttered cries of consternation and began to retreat.

Hal sprang from his place of concealment and opened fire again. So sudden was the lad's maneuver that the enemy was taken by surprise. Then, suddenly angered, they seemed to forget all about the danger of the advancing American troops and closed in on Hal.

In a moment the lad found himself hard pressed. He emptied his revolvers into the Germans, then

clubbed his revolvers and fought for his life. But the odds were too great against him.

He staggered under a heavy blow from a rifle butt; a second crashed down on his shoulder.

There was a cry from behind him, and an American officer jumped forward so swiftly that he left his men in the lurch. He hurled himself upon the Germans surrounding Hal, and struck out heavily.

He caught a blow on his own arm that was meant for Hal's head, and ran his sword through the man who had delivered it.

Now the other Americans drew near and the Germans fled.

Hal looked at the officer who had saved him. It was Chester.

"Just in time again, old man," said Hal quietly. "How do you happen to be here?"

"Came to the front with dispatches for Colonel Greene," said Chester hurriedly. "Then the advance was ordered. I came along, at Colonel Greene's invitation. How do you feel, and what are you doing here?"

"I feel well enough," replied Hal. "Those fellows didn't do much damage," and then he gave an account of his adventures leading up to his present condition.

"Well," said Chester, "the best thing we can do is both go back where we belong."

"Suits me," agreed Hal. "I judge that this bat-

tle will be over shortly and that before long we shall be back with General Pershing. I'll meet you there, Chester."

"Good," said Chester. "I'll wait for you."

They shook hands and parted.

Meanwhile, the great American advance continued.

Despite the reinforcements rushed up by the Germans during the night, the Americans had pushed forward all morning. Now, at ten o'clock, they were in the outskirts of St. Mihiel itself. The German troops were fast becoming demoralized.

From the north, from the south and from the west the Americans poured into the city. The strategy of General Pershing's plans became apparent. The greatest military geniuses in the German army had been out-generaled by the American commander-in-chief.

At eleven o'clock only a few Germans remained in St. Mihiel and these gave ground rapidly before the advance of the American troops. At a quarter to twelve, there was not a single German in the city of St. Mihiel, save the prisoners.

Marshal Foch had given the Americans ten days to clean out the St. Mihiel sector.

They had done it in thirty hours!

Hal reported to General Lewis his failure to deliver the dispatches he had carried to General Brown. General Lewis treated the matter lightly.

"It's no serious matter," he said. "Anyhow, we have been victorious. But I have a mission now that I am sure you will fulfill. I have a dispatch—my report—that I want you to take to General Pershing."

That night Hal delivered the report into the hands of the American commander-in-chief in person.

"Be seated, captain," said General Pershing. "I have a little surprise for you—in fact, I may say two surprises."

Hal's curiosity was aroused, but he said nothing.

Ten minutes later, Chester entered. General Pershing smiled at the surprise both lads showed.

"That is one of my surprises for both of you," he said. "Captain Crawford arrived earlier with dispatches. Captain Paine has just arrived," he explained to Chester.

"And we're both glad to be here, sir," said Hal.

"Indeed we are, sir," agreed Chester.

"I'm glad to hear that," said General Pershing. "Now I have another surprise in store for each of you."

He passed to each a paper that bore the government official seal. The lads glanced at them eagerly, a queer feeling in their breasts, for each felt sure that he knew what the paper he held meant.

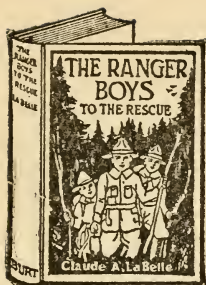
And they were right; for the words that now

stared them in the face told them that they were no longer captains in the United States army.

They were majors, instead!

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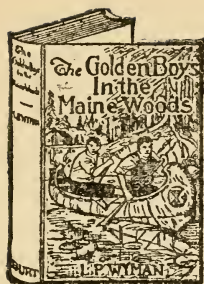
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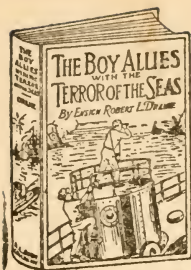
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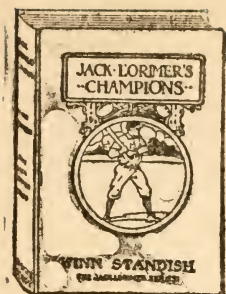
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